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Lenin, Hegel, and Western Marxism

A Critical Study

By

Kevin B. Anderson



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A Note on Sources and Abbreviations

To save space, when referring to Lenin's writings or to Hegel's *Science of Logic*, I will, using the abbreviations listed below, with footnote references provided (1) to pages in the standard Moscow-based English-language edition of Lenin's *Collected Works*, (2) to pages in the English translation of the *Science of Logic*, by Arnold Miller, and (3) to the numbered paragraphs found in all editions of Hegel's shorter *Encyclopedia Logic*. I will occasionally modify these translations, however. For Lenin I have used the translations in the standard English-language edition of the *Collected Works*, except with regard to the Hegel Notebooks in Volume 38. For the notebooks I have usually substituted Raya Dunayevskaya's translation, which tends to be more sensitive to Hegelian terminology, while still giving references to Volume 38 of the *Collected Works*. With Hegel's *Science of Logic* I will sometimes modify the Miller translation after consulting both the earlier Johnston and Struthers translation and the German original (Suhrkamp edition). With Hegel's shorter *Encyclopedia Logic* I have used the new Geraets, Suchting, and Harris translation, but I have sometimes modified it after consulting the earlier Wallace translation and the German original (Felix Meiner edition). A fuller account of these sources is found in the bibliography. Finally, all emphasis is in the original text unless otherwise noted.

Examples of References Used Directly in the Text:

CW 1:1 Volume 1, page 1, of Lenin's *Collected Works*

SL 1 page 1 of Hegel's *Science of Logic*

EL ¶ 102 Paragraph 102 of Hegel's *Encyclopedia Logic* (Shorter Logic)

Lenin and the Dialectics of Revolution:

Introduction to the New Edition

1 Lenin in the Present Moment¹

What does it mean to take up V.I. Lenin's thought today, long after the collapse of the Soviet Union and when new types of revolutionary and left-wing movements have re-emerged in the wake of the Great Recession and the Arab revolutions? In the present context, the predominant perspective on the left of 'democratic socialism', which espouses major but non-revolutionary reforms of the capitalist system, has been on the upswing.

To this kind of politics, Lenin offers a clear alternative, for no Marxist thinker was more identified with revolution as opposed to reform, with smashing the state apparatus, with dismantling imperialism, and with breaking decisively with the capitalist order. Moreover, Lenin has also resisted academicisation. As Slavoj Žižek noted in typically provocative language several years before the Great Recession, 'Marx is OK' for academics, as someone 'who provided perfect descriptions of the capitalist dynamic' or 'who portrayed the alienation and reification of our daily lives'. But, Žižek added, 'there is a consensus among (whatever remains of) today's radical Left' that 'we should leave the Leninist legacy behind', including especially his 'ruthless focusing on the class struggle' or 'the violent revolutionary seizure of power'.² In short, returning to Lenin was an attitude at variance with those left-wing academics who (in 2002) 'silently count on the long-term stability of the American capitalist model'.³ Here Žižek not only implied the possibility of a real breaking point like the Great Recession, but also put his finger on the disconnect between most forms of intellectual radicalism and the burning anger of those who have been oppressed, marginalised, and exploited under today's neoliberal and formally democratic global order, itself under attack in recent years by right-wing populism.

1 I would like to thank Janet Afary, Peter Hudis, Karel Ludenhoff, and the late James Obst for helpful comments on this introduction. I would also like to thank Sebastian Budgen for encouraging – over several years – this second edition. In addition, I am grateful to Danny Hayward for conforming the manuscript to *Historical Materialism* style and to Ryan Fisher for research assistance.

2 Žižek 2002a, p. 4. Tariq Ali put it similarly: 'It takes imagination to read Lenin and Trotsky as liberals underneath the mask' (2017, p. 2). It should be emphasised though, as August Nimtz (2014) and John Riddell (2019) remind us, that Lenin advocated armed upheaval against despotic regimes, but also supported participation in electoral politics at many junctures.

3 Žižek 2002b, p. 171.

For Lenin, of course, the point of radical rupture was not an economic crisis, but the catastrophe of World War I in 1914 and the betrayal of internationalist principles by most of the large Marxist parties, which opportunistically backed their respective governments rather than stand against the war fever that swept their nations. As Žižek wrote in 2017 on the centennial of the Russian Revolution:

This moment of *Verzweiflung* [despair], this catastrophe, opened up the site for the Leninist event, for breaking with the evolutionary historicism of the Second International – and Lenin was the only one at the level of this opening, the only one to articulate the Truth of the catastrophe. Born in this moment of despair was the Lenin who, via the detour of a close reading of Hegel's *Logic*, was able to discern the unique chance for revolution.⁴

In short, when one speaks of Lenin, one evokes unequivocally a revolutionary rupture with the capitalist order. The victory Lenin helped realise in 1917 involved not only courageous, even audacious revolutionary practice based upon clear principles, but also an original theorisation of revolution, starting with a deep digging into Hegel's writings, the wellspring of the modern dialectics of revolution.

At the same time, in evoking Lenin as a model for today, Žižek has tended to play down the authoritarianism of the single-party state established under the leadership of Lenin and Trotsky after November 1917. Worse, Žižek has actually flirted with aspects of the brutal Stalinist legacy as a kind of revolutionary gesticulating, forgetting that under Stalinist dictatorships, it is the working people, both urban and rural, who suffer the most, even more than the intellectuals. To take one example, Žižek wrote in the same essay quoted above of 'the authentic greatness of the Stalinist project', also praising Bertolt Brecht's espousal of Stalinism during the 1930s and his support of the repression of the East German workers' uprising of 1953.⁵

It is this notion of Lenin's legacy as authoritarian – viewed by Žižek in positive terms and by so many others in negative ones – that has played a decisive role in his relegation to the sidelines of current debates over overcoming capitalism, even among many of those well to the left of 'democratic socialism'. Here political and theoretical territory once occupied by followers of Lenin,

4 Žižek 2017, p. xv.

5 Žižek 2002b, p. 195.

including Trotskyists and other parts of the anti-Stalinist left, has in recent decades been increasingly occupied by anarchism and, within what remains of revolutionary Marxism, by proponents of Rosa Luxemburg. One can observe this in the strong anarchist presence in the Occupy movements of 2011 and in the ongoing revival of Luxemburg's thought. Many positive developments have flowed from this move away from Lenin, most notably a greater concern with democratic practices within revolutionary movements and organisations.

However, the increasing rejection *in toto* of Lenin from within the very parts of the left most committed to the total overcoming of capitalism comes at a price, for several reasons. First, it implies that these non-Leninist revolutionary tendencies are immune from the problems that transformed the Russian revolution of 1917 into a totalitarian dictatorship, whereas this is by no means certain. Second, most anarchists ignore the fact that after 1917 Lenin openly courted anarchists, writing in *State and Revolution* that the Second International had wrongly expelled them in many cases while keeping in its ranks reformists and opportunists. This resulted in the adherence of many anarchists to the new Communist International, especially those from anarcho-syndicalist backgrounds like Big Bill Haywood of the US Industrial Workers of the World and the Franco-Russian writer Victor Serge. Third, some of those who have gravitated toward Luxemburg have ignored or downplayed the fact that while she developed many valid critiques of Lenin, especially versus the one-party state he and Trotsky established, she exhibited many forms of affinity with him as well.⁶

For all these reasons, and more, we ignore or downplay Lenin's theory and practice at our peril. At the same time, however, I believe it is increasingly necessary to separate Lenin from much of what has been thought of as Leninism, to view him as what he really was, an independent-minded and highly original thinker in the Marxian tradition, someone who brought to the fore an innovative and important reading of Hegel and dialectics, an astute and creative theory of imperialism and national liberation, and a new and valuable conceptualisation of the state and revolution. To do so fully, we need to avoid the contextualist error, that of situating Lenin in his own times to the point that the deeper, more resonant, and universal content of his theorising is reduced to mere tactics and strategy, or to seeing his theoretical work as simply applying German Marxism to the Russian context. In short, even if Lenin had not led the most significant revolution carried out by Marxists, he would, like Luxem-

6 For a balanced assessment of their identities and differences, see Hudis 2018.

burg and a number of other important Marxist thinkers, still merit deep study, discussion, and of course, critique.

2 Lenin and Hegel Today

Where Lenin stands out as a unique figure among his peers – whether the ‘classical’ revolutionary Marxists Leon Trotsky and Rosa Luxemburg, let alone less revolutionary ones like Karl Kautsky – is in his deep study and absorption into his overall theorising, of Hegel and dialectics. In writing these lines, I do not intend to downplay the importance of his work on imperialism and national liberation, or on the state and revolution. What I am arguing, as I did in the original edition of this book, is that those Hegel Notebooks of 1914–15, and the related essays and fragments on dialectics, constituted the philosophical foundation for his post-1914 theoretical work, helping to shape that work into a body of creative, revolutionary thought. (I use the term Hegel Notebooks rather than the more commonly used one, Philosophical Notebooks, as the latter title refers to the whole of what was assembled as Vol. 38 of Lenin’s *Collected Works*, some of it from as early as 1895.)

When *Lenin, Hegel, and Western Marxism* first appeared some twenty-five years ago, Lenin’s relation to Hegel and his dialectical notebooks of 1914–15 were still fairly obscure topics. To take one example from the 1980s, Neil Harding’s entry on Lenin in Tom Bottomore’s authoritative *Dictionary of Marxist Thought* failed to mention dialectics or Hegel.⁷ Harding also neglected to take up Hegel and dialectics in his full-length study of Lenin’s political thought published a few years earlier, although he occasionally mentioned there ‘a dialectical process at work’ in his analysis of society.⁸ To be sure, Harding’s work has helped to pry Lenin interpretation loose from Cold War notions of an organisation man who was a brilliant tactician and strategist of revolution but who lacked theoretical commitments, let alone any originality in that sphere. Similarly on this issue to Harding, in an even longer study in the 1970s, Tony Cliff referred in passing to ‘the magnificent, terse and lively *Philosophical Notebook*, Vol. 38 of Lenin’s *Collected Works*’, but provided no further elaboration.⁹

Today the situation is entirely different. The basic argument of *Lenin, Hegel, and Western Marxism*, to the effect that Lenin studied Hegel and dialectics in

⁷ Harding 1983, pp. 277–9.

⁸ Harding 1981, p. 36.

⁹ Cliff 1975, p. 291.

1914–15 as part of an attempt to refound revolutionary Marxism in the wake of the collapse of the Second International, has gained very wide currency. Specifically, Lenin's dialectical studies are often connected, as was the case in this book, to his major theoretical writings like *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism* (1916) and *State and Revolution* (1917). Thus, whereas the original 1995 edition of the present book had a sort of insurgent character, at least within the Marxist left, today its arguments are fairly widely accepted in those quarters. As Tamas Krausz sums up Lenin's encounter with Hegel in a recent serious monograph¹⁰ on his thought: 'In the years preceding and following the war, Lenin wrote excellent analyses of the new traits of capitalist development ... This period began with the notes he took while reading Hegel's *Science of Logic* in 2014–15'.¹¹

This seems like progress, as an example of how Marxism, especially in the English-speaking world where empiricism and positivism have weighed particularly heavily, has moved away from mechanical and reductionist forms of materialism in general, and in its interpretation of Lenin in particular. But as the dialectical tradition tells us, no form of progress occurs without contradiction. Therefore, it is not surprising that the wide acceptance of the importance of Lenin as a reader of Hegel has led to counterarguments that deny the significance of his turn toward Hegel, or that maintain that this marked neither a real change on his part nor any significant difference from the standard dialectical materialism of earlier figures like Friedrich Engels or Georgi Plekhanov.

These countercurrents will be taken up below, but first I want to mention a few aspects of what I see as original and creative in Lenin's grappling with Hegel and dialectics in 1914–15 by (1) recapitulating some of the dialectical themes he developed from 1914 onwards and (2) looking at Marxist theory in relation to Lenin's writings on Hegel and the dialectic at five junctures, that of Georg Lukács in the 1920s, that of Henri Lefebvre and Norbert Guterman in the 1930s, that of the Johnson-Forest Tendency in the 1940s–50s, that of Louis Althusser and Raya Dunayevskaya in divergent ways after 1968, and that of the present moment, since the turn of the last century.

10 I leave aside hatchet jobs like that of Sebestyen 2017, which revives hoary views of Lenin as basically a violent fanatic.

11 Krausz 2015, p. 145.

3 Lenin and Hegel 1914–22, Some Key Examples

In *Lenin, Hegel, and Western Marxism*, I have argued that Lenin's Hegel Notebooks of 1914–15 and subsequent writings, some also on dialectics, mark a real departure in his thinking. To a great extent, they constituted a break with the reductionist and crude reflection theory of his *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* (1908). But an interpretive difficulty emerges here, in the sense that one cannot view the 1914–15 Notebooks productively if one reads them separately from the full text of Hegel's *Science of Logic*, as most of the Notebooks comprise carefully selected excerpts from the German idealist philosopher's book, accompanied at key junctures by commentary and summaries on Lenin's part. This is why I felt it necessary to carry out a full-length study of the Hegel Notebooks, to move beyond a battle of quotes from Lenin taken in isolation from Hegel's epochal dialectical treatise. Because we are faced with notebooks, not a draft manuscript, it is hard to sum up the main dialectical points Lenin retrieved from Hegel. Nevertheless, I will mention now some of the core issues in the Notebooks and Lenin's subsequent writings on Hegel and dialectics. This should not be construed as a summary of my book's 'findings', but merely as examples of the key dialectical concepts and issues Lenin worked through from 1914 onwards, mainly in the Hegel Notebooks.

First and most significantly, Lenin attacked vulgar or crude materialism at several junctures in the Hegel Notebooks, often tying it to his erstwhile philosophical mentor, Georgi Plekhanov: 'Plekhanov criticizes Kantianism ... more from a vulgar-materialistic standpoint than from a dialectical-materialistic one'.¹² These attacks culminated in the best-known passage from the Notebooks: 'Aphorism: It is impossible completely to understand Marx's *Capital*, and especially its first chapter, without having thoroughly studied and understood the whole of Hegel's *Logic*. Consequently, none of the Marxists for the past 1/2 century have understood Marx!!'¹³ This statement has frequently been interpreted as a self-critique and as an expression of a break with his earlier perspectives, especially with the Marxism of the Second International. It is important to note as well that Lenin articulated this aphorism right after studying Hegel's devastatingly critical analysis of the syllogism in philosophy. There, Hegel argued that the universal cannot just jump to the individual, but must particularise itself, must be somehow mediated. Hegel concluded the chapter by writing, 'The syllogism is mediation'.¹⁴ As he read this part of the *Logic*, Lenin

¹² Lenin 1961a, p. 178.

¹³ Lenin, 1961a, p. 180.

¹⁴ Hegel 1969, p. 704.

seemed to allude to Marx on commodity fetishism in the first chapter of *Capital*: 'Hegel's analysis of syllogism (individual, particular, universal, etc.) recalls Marx's imitation of Hegel in Chapter 1'.¹⁵ This is especially important given that Lenin never wrote directly on commodity fetishism, as it suggests an interest in a topic so important to later Marxists.

Second, Lenin credited idealism in new ways in the Hegel Notebooks, suggesting that the ideal and the real stand in relationship to each other in dialectical thinking. He did so in the sense that human consciousness can go beyond the given reality in a positive, revolutionary manner, most strikingly in his exclamatory statement, 'Man's consciousness not only reflects the world, but creates it'. At this point, Lenin also made an explicit connection to the social world of change and revolution, writing 'i.e., the world does not satisfy man and man decides to change it by his activity'.¹⁶ This comment did not come out of thin air; nor was it merely a general response to Hegel. Rather, Lenin seemed to be responding specifically here to Hegel's treatment of the practical idea, where the human subject quests to change the world and where, as the German philosopher wrote, 'the subject possesses ... a certainty of its own actuality and the non-actuality of the world'.¹⁷ It is important to note that these remarks by Lenin, interesting in themselves, concerned an equally interesting section of the *Science of Logic* where to the surprise of many, including Lenin, Hegel seemed to rate the practical idea higher than the theoretical idea, writing that as the concept moves between the theoretical and the practical idea, their conflict did not begin to be resolved until 'cognition is restored and united with the practical Idea'.¹⁸ This part of the *Logic*, and Lenin's response to it, preoccupied both Lukács and Dunayevskaya, albeit in very different ways. This is because it can be connected to the Marxian notion of the unity of theory and practice, a point amplified by the fact that Hegel began the next and final chapter of the *Science of Logic* by calling the absolute idea the unity of the theoretical and the practical idea.

Third, Lenin found further social and material content in Hegel's work, especially where he least expected to do so, in the absolute idea chapter, where he exclaimed that Hegel, 'Stretches a hand to materialism'.¹⁹ It is significant that Lenin did so in reading the *Science of Logic*, a Hegel text that lacks much social or historical content, in contrast to the one most radicals read nowadays, the

15 Lenin, 1961a, p. 178.

16 Lenin, 1961a, pp. 212–13.

17 Hegel 1969, p. 818.

18 Hegel 1969, p. 823.

19 Lenin, 1961a, p. 234.

Phenomenology of Spirit. Lenin's reading of the absolute as partly materialist also constitutes a point of difference with Engels, who had stressed the revolutionary character of Hegel's dialectical method versus his philosophical system culminating in the absolute, with the latter pilloried as a 'dogmatic' flight into a pure idealism of no use to Marxists.²⁰

Fourth, in a 1922 programmatic article, Lenin called upon Marxists of the new Soviet Russia and their co-thinkers around the world to carry out 'a systematic study of Hegelian dialectics from a materialist standpoint'. He linked this in the same sentence to another dialectical turn that had formed a part of his new dialectical analysis of imperialism and what he construed as its negation, movements for national liberation, 'the awakening to life and struggle of the new classes in the East (Japan, India, and China), i.e., the hundreds of millions of people who form the greater part of the world population'.²¹ He concluded by calling for the formation of a 'kind of "Society of Materialist Friends of Hegelian Dialectics"'.²²

In *Lenin, Hegel, and Western Marxism*, I not only stressed Lenin's originality and his move away from mechanical and even Engelsian materialism after 1914, but I also put forward the notion of a certain ambivalence in his legacy on dialectics. First, I noted his public references after 1914 to Plekhanov as an important source in Marxist philosophy and his decision to allow the republication without comment of *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* in 1920. Since his characterisation in the Hegel Notebooks of Plekhanov as a vulgar materialist remained private, the newness of what he had developed on Hegel and dialectics was seriously obscured. However, as discussed below, discerning thinkers like Georg Lukács were able to glean some of what Lenin had developed on the dialectic and to use it to good effect. Second, I noted that even in his private Hegel Notebooks, Lenin was so enthusiastic in his embrace of Hegel's notion of the practical idea that he gave short shrift to the theoretical idea. Both of these critiques stemmed from Dunayevskaya's later writings on Lenin. However, I concluded that it was more important to focus on the new perspectives Lenin had worked out in 1914–15 and after, as it still offered us a pathway within Marxism to exit from the kind of crude materialism that has so often plagued the tradition, especially given the resonance of Lenin as a thinker and a revolutionary far beyond the circles of academic and cultural Marxism to which Hegelian Marxism has been so often confined.

20 Engels 1990, p. 361.

21 Lenin, 1961b, p. 233.

22 Lenin, 1961b, p. 234.

4 Lenin and the Hegelian Marxist Tradition

As Michael Löwy noted in a perceptive review of *Lenin, Hegel, and Western Marxism*, the term 'Western Marxism' may have been ill-chosen.²³ In fact, the most accurate rendering of the title would have been 'Lenin, Hegel, and Hegelian Marxism and Its Critics', but that would have been inelegant. For better or worse, I therefore used the term 'Western Marxism' as a catch-all in order to encompass both Hegelian Marxists like Lukács and anti-Hegelians like Althusser. Let us look again at some of those thinkers who grappled with Lenin and Hegel.

In a little-noticed aside in the preface to the original 1923 edition of *History and Class Consciousness*, Lukács alluded to Lenin's championing of Hegel (at a time when the Hegel Notebooks were nearly a decade away from publication) by quoting from the above-cited essay about becoming 'materialist friends of the Hegelian dialectic'.²⁴ (I had not noticed this myself when writing the first edition of the present book.) Tellingly, Lukács, who seemed to have little interest in what is today termed the Global South, did not mention how Lenin had linked dialectics to the emergence of anti-imperialist movements. Karl Korsch gave Lenin's injunction to become materialist friends of Hegel's dialectic more prominence in *Marxism and Philosophy*, published that same year.

In his book, Lukács attacked both neo-Kantian and positivist positions. He did not limit his attacks to non-Marxist academics, however, explicitly targeting not only Kautsky and the Marxism of the Second International, but also, and most controversially, Engels, all of whom he saw as expounding a subjectless, not very dialectical materialism. With his argument that the dialectical method was the core of Marxism, Lukács sought to overturn decades of what Lenin had termed vulgar materialism in his private notes. Lukács's book stirred up interest in Marxism among younger intellectuals while also incurring the wrath of Comintern leader Grigory Zinoviev, who infamously denounced him for idealist deviations from Marxism. But the return of Marxism to Hegel could not be put back into the bottle, still less after Lenin's Hegel Notebooks appeared in Russian (1929–30) and then German (1932), let alone the publication during the same period of Marx's *1844 Manuscripts* (1927 in Russian, 1932 in German).

From then on, discussions on Lenin's Hegelianism sometimes intersected with those on the young Marx, although the reverse was not as often the case.

23 Löwy 1997, pp. 46–7.

24 Lukács 1971, p. xlv.

This intersection occurred first in France with the work of Lefebvre, who along with fellow Communist Party member Norbert Guterman issued a translation of the Hegel Notebooks in 1938 under the title *Cahiers sur la dialectique de Hegel* with the country's most prestigious publisher, Éditions Gallimard. Previously, Lefebvre and Guterman had published parts of the 1844 *Manuscripts*. This placed the Hegel Notebooks on the intellectual map in France more so than in any other country over the next several decades. Their lengthy introduction to the Notebooks suggested a development in Lenin's dialectical thinking since *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*, which the Stalinised Communist Party had issued in French a few years earlier. As a whole, Lefebvre's and Guterman's introduction dealt more with Marxism and philosophy in general than Lenin's notebooks *per se*. However, they did discuss Lenin's critique of war and imperialism after 1914, but like Lukács, they did not mention anti-colonial national liberation movements. Possibly intending an implicit critique of Engels, they wrote at one point that dialectics could not be reduced to a set of formal laws. After World War II, Lefebvre was pressured into humiliating self-criticisms for an allegedly idealist outlook and it was not until 1959, after he had been expelled from the French Communist Party, that he finally made explicit his view that the Hegel Notebooks exhibited strong differences with *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*.

The next juncture at which Lenin's Hegel Notebooks figured in the creative development of Marxism was in the US after World War II with the Johnson-Forest Tendency. This small but intellectually fecund faction within Trotskyism was led by C.L.R. James, Raya Dunayevskaya, and Grace Lee Boggs. Eager to develop their state-capitalist analysis of Stalin's Russia and to take up the intertwining of race and class in the US versus the predominant class reductionism, they distanced themselves from the Leninist concept of the vanguard party while also delving into the young Marx and especially Lenin's Hegel Notebooks, which Dunayevskaya translated without being able to find a publisher. This was the first time that a group of Marxist thinkers had made Lenin's Hegel Notebooks their point of departure. During this period, James published in mimeographed form his *Notes on Dialectics* (1948), which stressed issues in Lenin and Hegel like breaks and leaps rather than evolutionary gradualness, spontaneity versus top-down revolutionary movements, and self-movement by conscious human subjects. In dozens of unpublished letters in 1949–51, the three theorists debated issues like dialectical versus mechanical materialism, with Nikolai Bukharin as the prime exemplar of the latter among revolutionary thinkers, and the relationship of idealism to materialism. But the newest point they took up in terms of theorising about Lenin was the notion that his post-1914 books *Imperialism and State and Revolution* were deeply indebted to the

Hegel Notebooks. The first discussion in English of Lenin and Hegel in widely published form came three years after the breakup of the Johnson-Forest Tendency, with Dunayevskaya's *Marxism and Freedom* (1958). It included an analysis of the 1914–15 Notebooks as a turning point in dialectical thought as well as the first English translation of the Notebooks in the appendix. In a chapter on Lenin's relation to Hegel, Dunayevskaya took up his new dialectical insights into issues like self-movement, the revolutionary character of dialectical idealism, and the problem of vulgar materialism, including in Lenin's own earlier writings. In a discussion of Lenin's theory of imperialism, she viewed the concepts of the aristocracy of labour and of national liberation as outgrowths of his dialectical studies, giving particular attention to his writings on the 1916 Easter Uprising in Ireland. She also saw *State and Revolution* as the product of 'Hegelian-Marxian'²⁵ insights.

The next juncture at which Lenin's relation to Hegel became prominent was in the 1960s and 1970s in the US and France. Dunayevskaya, who in 1979 as my intellectual mentor encouraged me to write a dissertation on Lenin's relation to Hegel, had by then published several other accounts of Lenin's Hegel Notebooks, especially in her *Philosophy and Revolution* (1973). She continued to point to fine dialectical moments in the 1914–15 Hegel Notebooks, especially his notion – found also in Marx in 1844 – of a 'unity of materialism and idealism' flowing from 'Lenin's break with old concepts, which is nowhere more sharply expressed than in his commentary that "Cognition not only reflects the world, but creates it"'.²⁶ Dunayevskaya's critique of Bukharin, whom she charged with both mechanical materialism and an undialectical repudiation of all forms of nationalism in the epoch of imperialism, gave a philosophical framework to the linkages she drew between Lenin's writings on dialectics and those on imperialism and national liberation.

At the same time, Dunayevskaya now wrote of Lenin's philosophical ambivalence in the sense that his post-1914 writings sometimes gave mixed signals by referring to his post-1914 insights on dialectics while also mentioning Plekhanov's Marxism favourably and allowing *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* to be reprinted. Dunayevskaya pointed to this book's 'vulgarly materialist photocopy theory'.²⁷ At this juncture, 1973, Dunayevskaya still maintained that filling the 'theoretical void in the Marxist movement since the death of Lenin', not least on dialectics, was a key problem for the left.²⁸ By a decade later,

25 Dunayevskaya 1958, p. 191.

26 Dunayevskaya 1973, p. 103.

27 Dunayevskaya 1973, p. 101.

28 Dunayevskaya 1973, p. 125.

however, she had distanced herself further from him, viewing Lenin – along with Engels, Luxemburg, and Trotsky – as a post-Marx Marxist who had not fully integrated dialectics into his theory and practice. She now wrote that despite the significant dialectical achievements of the Hegel Notebooks, Lenin's failure to make very many of these insights public showed 'the depth of the economist mire' into which post-Marx Marxism 'had sunk'.²⁹

While Althusser may not have been aware of Dunayevskaya's work on Lenin and Hegel, which was not translated into French until 1971, he would certainly have been cognisant of that of Lefebvre, who had helped make the Lenin-Hegel relationship more central to French Marxism than to any other national variant. Thus, in his counterattack against humanist and Hegelian Marxism in the 1960s, Althusser engaged not only with Marx texts like the 1844 *Manuscripts* or the fetishism section of the first chapter of *Capital*, but also with Lenin's Hegel Notebooks. Althusser took them up sparingly in the early 1960s in *For Marx*, a book whose main aim was to theorise the unfortunate notion of an epistemological break between the young and the mature Marx. In so doing, he took Lenin seriously out of context,³⁰ having him criticise Plekhanov not for vulgar materialism (a concept Althusser did not mention), nor for a failure to grapple with Hegel's *Science of Logic*, but for a totally subordinate point not central at all to the Hegel Notebooks, applying the dialectic too 'externally' to 'the natural sciences'.³¹

At the end of the 1960s, in *Lenin and Philosophy*, Althusser's main essay on Lenin was a strange paean to *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*, with hardly a mention of the Hegel Notebooks. But in a shorter essay devoted to the Notebooks, Althusser found that he could not reject these writings as easily as he had those of the young Marx, for they were clearly from the mature Lenin, on the eve of his global revolutionary impact. Instead, Althusser deconstructed Lenin's core evocations of the power of Hegel and dialectics, most dramatically with regard to Lenin's aphorism to the effect that a thorough grasp of Hegel's Logic was needed to fully understand *Capital*. Althusser dismissed out of hand the notion that Lenin was here acknowledging some limitations of his earlier work, and after several levels of argumentation, arrived at what he regarded as a correct reading of Lenin's statement, in what he termed 'an aphorism of my own': 'it is impossible to understand Hegel without having thoroughly studied and understood *Capital*'.³² What this had to do with Lenin's own writings

29 Dunayevskaya 1991, p. 116.

30 For the quotes from Lenin and Althusser compared, see pp. 325–26 of this work.

31 Althusser 1970, p. 170.

32 Althusser 1971, p. 112.

on Hegel and dialectics was unclear, except in that it twisted them into their opposite. It is also interesting to note that Althusser wrote all of this without dealing directly with any of Hegel's own texts, unlike the previous commentators on Lenin and Hegel discussed above. Of course, Althusser did not succeed in casting Hegel completely out of French Marxism, as seen in Löwy's 1973 book³³ on the dialectic in Marx, Luxemburg, and Lenin, but the often positive reception of Althusser's work, continuing through to today, represents an obstacle to truly dialectical thinking.

While the present book, originally published in 1995, garnered largely positive responses, a new discussion of Lenin and Hegel emerged a dozen years later, with the publication of the collection *Lenin Reloaded* in 2007, edited by Sebastian Budgen, Stathis Kouvelakis, and Slavoj Žižek. This volume, based on an international conference Žižek organized in early 2001, assembled a number of Marxist luminaries, among them Étienne Balibar, Terry Eagleton, Fredric Jameson, and Antonio Negri, in an effort to revive Lenin's thought in the face of the supposed death of Marxism and, in particular, of Leninism. Subsequently, the volume was translated into several languages, among them Spanish, German, Japanese, and Turkish. Surprisingly, it was the coverage of Lenin on Hegel and dialectics in this volume that seemed to create the most discussion, prompting one annoyed reviewer to title his essay 'Hegel Reloaded', referring mainly to the chapters by Stathis Kouvelakis and this writer.³⁴ Today, over a decade later, it is evident that the topic has refused to die and that the notion of a major debt to Hegel on Lenin's part may even have become the standard interpretation, not only of his philosophical position, but also of the intellectual foundation of his major writings after 1914. In this sense, the present book succeeded beyond all hopes I held at the time of its publication a quarter of a century ago. If that is the case, perhaps then the essays criticising the Hegelian interpretation of Lenin that have been appearing in the theoretical literature over the past few years are also an acknowledgement of the headway that its central argument has gained.³⁵

33 The chapter on Lenin and Hegel of this book appeared in English in Löwy 1976.

34 Turley 2007.

35 To be sure, many positive interpretations of the Lenin-Hegel argument continue to appear as well, with particular verve and force in discussions by cultural Marxists (Watson 2013, Suvin 2018).

5 Was Lenin Really a Hegelian Marxist after 1914?

It is to these critiques that I now turn. In doing so, I will leave to the side pre-2007 studies like Robert Service's 2000 biography of Lenin, a step backwards from his earlier book on Lenin's political thought. In the biography, Service presented him as vengeful and dogmatic. He also dismissed the Hegel Notebooks as the 'jottings' of someone lacking a philosophical education. Nor will I discuss here Neil Harding's *Leninism* (1996), where the author finally engages the Notebooks, only to conclude that the study of Hegel made Lenin more dogmatic, reinforcing 'his own sense of certitude'.³⁶

Most of those who have recently taken issue with the Lenin and Hegel interpretations outlined above, and of which Althusser was the most trenchant early critic, have used variations of what might be termed a contextualist argument. It has been argued that if one really views Lenin's Hegel Notebooks in light of his earlier philosophical writings, or of those of Engels and Plekhanov, or in the context of Soviet Marxism during the 1920s, then what seemed original could be shown to be far less so and one could therefore pull Lenin back into the realm of orthodox dialectical materialism. At a conceptual level, those who would frame the issue in this manner should remember Karel Kosík's cautionary note about reductionism, about 'the method of "nothing but"', which reduces 'anything new to conditions and prerequisites; the new is "nothing but" – the old'.³⁷

Interestingly, when writers on Marx try a one-sidedly contextualist tack, they are often rebuked or seen as hostile to Marx. For example, Gareth Stedman Jones's work has been attacked with good effect for keeping Marx in the nineteenth century by way of a 'traditionalist historicist approach' that obscures his contemporary relevance and originality as a thinker.³⁸ A second example of contextualisation as critique and even dismissal could be found in Michel Foucault's by now classic dismissal of Marx's thought as a left-wing variant of one of his key theoretical sources, Ricardian political economy: 'Marxism exists in nineteenth-century thought like a fish in water: that is, it is unable to breathe anywhere else'.³⁹ Serious students of Marx have long sought to go beyond this kind of contextualisation, to present Marx as someone who went beyond his own times and his own intellectual influences.

36 Service 2000, p. 244; Harding 1996, p. 238. I have considered these two books in more detail in Anderson 2014.

37 Kosík 1976, p. 14.

38 Stedman-Jones 2016; Abromeit 2019, p. 969.

39 Foucault 1971, p. 262.

That is what I tried to do with Lenin in *Lenin, Hegel, and Western Marxism*, to deliberately distance him from a solely Russian context and to present him as a global Marxist thinker addressing a global audience, something the evidence suggested strongly that he was trying to do from 1914 onwards. In this regard, it is notable that Russia does not even figure very much in his three major theoretical works after 1914, the Hegel Notebooks and the books *Imperialism* and *State and Revolution*. And that is also why I presented Lenin's Notebooks in the context of Marxist debates in Western Europe and North America over the dialectic, again trying to move beyond narrow forms of contextualism.

But even from a contextualist standpoint, one could still ask why – unlike most of those who have engaged Lenin's encounter with Hegel, from Lukács onward – the recent critics of the view that Lenin created something original in the Hegel Notebooks have not grappled directly very much with Hegel's *Science of Logic*, the actual text that Lenin was reading.

Here, I would like to pose an aphorism of my own: It is impossible to understand fully Lenin's Hegel Notebooks without a thorough study of Hegel's *Science of Logic*.

Lest the reader think that by advocating a reading of Lenin through Hegel I have entered the sphere of pure idealism rather than materialist dialectics, recall Marx's own description, usually forgotten, but in no less important a text than *Capital*, of 'the Hegelian "contradiction", which is the source of all dialectics'.⁴⁰

That said, the recent critics of seeing Lenin's Hegel Notebooks as an original work and as a turning point in his thought have added some valuable points, albeit without shaking the fundamental argument of the present book.

In an erudite 2015 article on the historical context of the 1929–30 publication of Lenin's Philosophical Notebooks in the by then Stalinised Soviet Union, James D. White took issue with the view of the Notebooks as a dialectical departure. He discussed Hegel directly only as general background, not in terms of where Lenin engaged the *Logic*, and even there bends Hegel into a philosopher of 'continuities' rather than of leaps, negations, or contradictions.⁴¹ This differed from both the young Marx's singling out in 1844 of the 'dialectic of negativity as the moving and creative principle' in Hegel's philosophy and his explicit reference two decades later in *Capital* to Hegel on contradiction, cited above.⁴²

40 Marx 1976a, p. 744. In this passage Marx was attacking the empiricist logic of John Stuart Mill.

41 White 2015, p. 125.

42 Marx 1958, p. 309.

At the same time, White argued that Lenin gained a renewed interest in dialectics in 1913 when he grappled with the just published selected correspondence of Marx and Engels. Writing in an unfinished review, Lenin maintained that the 'central point' of the correspondence was 'dialectics'.⁴³ White also cited Lenin's more copious notes on this volume of correspondence, not included in English-language editions of his *Collected Works*. There, Lenin gave some attention to Marx's much discussed 1858 letter about how he had reread Hegel's *Logic* while writing what we now know as the *Grundrisse* and how he wished to write an essay on the rational – as opposed to mystified – aspects of Hegel's dialectic. In his notes on the Marx-Engels correspondence, Lenin wrote, 'The rational in Hegel's *Logic*, in his method'.⁴⁴ This adds at least a footnote to our understanding of Lenin's theoretical development, as it suggested that his focus on the *Science of Logic* in the autumn of 1914 may have been inspired by this Marx letter. In addition, White indicated that Lenin also annotated parts of the correspondence showing 'Marx's and Engels's attitude to the national question in Poland and Ireland'.⁴⁵ White also suggested plausibly that Lenin's autumn 1914 encyclopedia article on Marx 'drew heavily' on these four volumes of Marx correspondence.⁴⁶

Nonetheless, White's analysis exhibited two problems, both related to the limits of contextualism. First, by January 1915, Lenin had become dissatisfied with his encyclopedia article after working through the *Science of Logic* and wrote to its editors that he sought to make 'some corrections to the section on dialectics'.⁴⁷ This suggested that he had altered his views on dialectics, thus limiting somewhat the relevance of those 1913 notes to an understanding of where he had come by early 1915. The second problem concerns White's interpretation of Lenin's famous statement in the Hegel Notebooks, 'Aphorism: It is impossible completely to understand Marx's *Capital*, and especially its first chapter, without having thoroughly studied and understood the whole of Hegel's *Logic*. Consequently, none of the Marxists for the past 1/2 century have understood Marx!!'⁴⁸ White concluded that this 'is simply a restatement of what Marx had told Engels in his letter' of January 1858, as annotated by Lenin in reading the Marx-Engels correspondence. Let us quote Marx's statement in full from his letter of 16 January 1858:

43 Lenin 1963a, p. 554.

44 Cited in White 2015, p. 135.

45 White 2015, p. 135.

46 White 2015, p. 136.

47 Lenin 1966a, p. 317.

48 Lenin 1961a, p. 180.

I have completely demolished the theory of profit as hitherto propounded. What was of great use to me as regards *method* of treatment was Hegel's *Logic* at which I had taken another look **by mere accident**, Freiligrath having found and made me a present of several volumes of Hegel, originally the property of Bakunin. If ever the time comes when such work is again possible, I should very much like to write 2 or 3 sheets making accessible to the common reader the *rational* aspect of the method which Hegel not only discovered but also mystified.⁴⁹

How Lenin was simply repeating Marx here escapes me, since Marx was referring to his method of work while writing the *Grundrisse*, while Lenin was critiquing other Marxists and probably himself for neglecting Hegel and therefore not grasping Marx's *Capital*. More importantly, Lenin said no such thing about Marxists not grasping Marx due to lack of study of Hegel in his 1913 drafts and notes concerning the Marx-Engels correspondence, although he did mention Hegel and dialectics in general, and the *Logic* specifically. Thus, I think that White missed the new in Lenin after 1914 on Hegel and dialectics in his quest to cut the Hegel Notebooks down to size, trapped in what Kosík – already cited above – aptly termed a process of transforming ‘the new’ into ‘“nothing but” – the old’.⁵⁰

White also developed some points concerning the circumstances in which the Hegel Notebooks were first published, in 1929–30, at a time when Stalin was looking to undermine the editor of Marx's collected works, David Riazanov. Riazanov, whose institute included former Mensheviks like I.I. Rubin, was reluctant to regard Lenin as an original Marxist thinker, for example seeing his concept of dialectic as in basic continuity with Plekhanov. It was under pressure from Stalin, White reported, that the initial publication of the Hegel Notebooks took place, with the editors stressing their originality versus the Marxism of the Second International.

But White stretched the evidence beyond recognition when he used this historical context to conclude that the notion of Lenin's rethinking the dialectic in light of the collapse of the Second International in 1914 was therefore ‘a myth, a piece of academic folklore’.⁵¹ Was the Stalinist ideological apparatus then under construction actually imbued with a Hegelian, dialectical spirit, rather than the

49 Marx 1983a, p. 249. Those who insist a line of continuity in dialectical thinking that runs Marx-Engels-Plekhanov-Lenin should note that, even after being prodded by Marx, Engels in his reply failed to respond to Marx's substantive theoretical points.

50 Kosík 1976, p. 14.

51 White 2015, p. 141.

occasional attack on mechanical materialism for factional reasons, or the ritual use of the term dialectic to justify its political zigzags? White's conclusion was deeply problematic on at least three counts.

First, the apparatus published the Hegel Notebooks as part of what it called the Philosophical Notebooks, which comprised a host of other material going back to 1895 and including also notes on Feuerbach, Aristotle, and Lassalle, all of which obscured the fact that Hegel was the philosopher with whom Lenin was most engaged, save of course Marx.⁵² The difference of approach between what the apparatus called the Philosophical Notebooks and how more dialectically-oriented Marxists saw this material is easily observed in how both Lefebvre and Dunayevskaya published the Hegel Notebooks as a separate text, something the Stalinists never did.⁵³

Second, it was the sin of idealist deviation or Hegelianism, or both, that was to haunt Stalinised Marxism for the next decades. For example, both Lukács and Lefebvre were forced in that spirit to issue self-criticisms after publishing important work on dialectics.

Third, the apparatus always insisted on a continuity between the Hegel Notebooks, which it published sparingly, and Lenin's crude *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* of 1908, which, unlike the Notebooks, it repeatedly issued in widely circulated form. With its call for *partinost* (partyness or partisanship) in philosophy, Lenin's *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* proved to be an especially useful work for disciplining wayward intellectuals, warranting its translation into numerous languages once Stalin was in power. In 1908, of course, Lenin had meant not loyalty to the party but a more generalised loyalty to Marxist materialism, i.e., partisanship, but this was forgotten, sometimes deliberately.

That said, White has carried out original research that deepens our understanding of the process of Lenin's dialectical thinking, so long as one doesn't let the search for context obscure its main lines.

52 This fact continues to be remarked upon, as seen in Suvin (2018, p. 361), who wrote of 'the *Philosophical Notebooks* (wrongly titled by editors under Stalin, it should have really been *Notebooks on Hegel*)'.

53 The amalgamation of the Hegel Notebooks with other notes, or even ignoring them in favour of other far less extensive ones from the same period, has continued ever since, as seen in Althusser (1971), who characterised them as notes on Hegel and Feuerbach; Service (2000) who stressed they covered Hegel, Clausewitz, and Aristotle; or Ali (2017), who went into detail on notes on Clausewitz from 1915 but did not mention those on Hegel that seem to have sparked Lenin's interest in the German military strategist, widely considered to have been influenced by Hegel.

In a more recent essay, Vesa Oittinen covered similar ground, but without as much original argument or textual evidence. He noted in passing ‘the formidable difference’⁵⁴ between Lenin’s Hegel Notebooks and *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*, but from then on sought to show that these differences did not amount to very much. Oittinen attempted to show this by focusing on Lenin’s 1922 article, seized upon by Lukács, which called for the direct study of Hegel by Marxist philosophers. Oittinen concluded that it did not, despite appearances, go beyond *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*, because Lenin also wrote that Hegel should be interpreted materialistically. But where in *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*, or the Marxism of the Second International more generally, was such an emphasis given to the direct study of Hegel’s major writings? Instead, to the extent that they grappled with German idealism at all, the Marxist theorists of the Second International were imbued with the neo-Kantianism that dominated German academic philosophy at the time.

On this issue, Oittinen has made the plausible suggestion that since Lenin had not directly studied Immanuel Kant very much, ‘he repudiates Kant, but means in fact the Neo-Kantians and their subjectivistic interpretation of critical philosophy ... The latter provided an interpretation of Kant’s philosophy that was far more subjectivistic and idealistic than the original doctrine.’⁵⁵ Here Oittinen’s contextualism bore some fruit. So did his stress on Bukharin’s well-known intellectual debt to Alexander Bogdanov, Lenin’s eclectic positivist target in *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*. This, Oittinen wrote, offered an explanation overlooked by other scholars for Lenin’s attack on Bukharin in his *Will for not having understood the dialectic*.

This creates two problems for Oittinen’s argument versus the newness of the Hegel Notebooks, however. First, Bogdanov’s influence on Bukharin has hardly been overlooked by scholars. Second and more importantly, Lenin’s problematic decision to allow the crudely materialist *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* to be republished in 1920 also seemed to have stemmed from the disagreement between Lenin and Bukharin over Bogdanov, who reasserted his influence after 1917 by espousing a movement for ‘proletarian culture’, something Lenin opposed as sectarian. Lenin expressed his opposition to both Bogdanov in general and the ‘proletarian culture’ movement in particular in a note accompanying the republication of *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*.⁵⁶ As I and others have argued, this suggested a more tactical reason, one specific to the

54 Oittinen 2018, p. 65.

55 Oittinen 2018, p. 78.

56 Lenin 1962a.

Russian context, rather than a broader philosophical reason for the republication, especially given the fact that Lenin made no push for it to be translated into German and other languages, as he had done with *Imperialism and State and Revolution*. Nor did he mention *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* in his programmatic article on dialectics published two years later, discussed below, which was immediately translated into multiple languages. Thus, the contingent nature of the 1920 republication of *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* undercuts arguments about its centrality to Lenin's thought, making it easier rather than harder to maintain the notion of a philosophical break, albeit an ambivalent one, in Lenin's concept of dialectic after his encounter with Hegel in 1914–15.

Overall, Oittinen has returned us almost to the Cold War liberal view of Lenin, in writing of Lenin as 'in the first instance, a politician' and to the 'role – indeed the primacy – of politics' in his outlook and actions.⁵⁷ This perspective has been challenged successfully beginning four decades ago with Harding's two-volume book on Lenin's political thought, in favour of interpretations that stress his commitment to Marxist theory as ground for political action and organisation. Instead, Oittinen moved us back to notions of Marx as the theorist and Lenin as the practitioner who was original only in terms of organisation, strategy, and tactics.

In his 2018 essay, Oittinen gave some attention to Lenin's 1904 statement about concrete dialectics in *One Step Forward, Two Steps Back*: 'One of the basic principles of dialectics is that there is no such thing as abstract truth, truth is always concrete.'⁵⁸ Unfortunately, Oittinen used the concept of the concrete in an uncritical manner, failing to distinguish between the empirically concrete and the dialectically concrete, going so far as to write that Lenin's concrete 'is factual – it consists of an empirical inquiry'.⁵⁹ He then caricatured Hegel as having discarded rather than critically appropriated the moment of empiricism, making his dialectic nearly as abstract as Plato's. Lenin himself may have been less clear on these differences in 1904, but after his 1914–15 Hegel studies, his notion of dialectical concreteness deepened considerably. Still, Oittinen insisted, 'for Hegel, the goal was to construct an organic, richly detailed totality, while for Lenin there were no such "totalist" ambitions'.⁶⁰

How does that square with Lenin's 1921 comment about the dialectics of the concrete, in a well-known text Oittinen does not mention? I believe that this

57 Oittinen 2018, pp. 67, 68.

58 Lenin 1961c, p. 409.

59 Oittinen 2018, p. 73.

60 Oittinen 2018, p. 74.

text shows decisively that Lenin's notion of the concrete was hardly limited to the empirical concrete by that time, after the Hegel Notebooks:

Dialectical logic demands that we should go further. Firstly, if we are to have a true knowledge of an object we must look at and examine all its facets, its connections and 'mediacies'. That is something we cannot ever hope to achieve completely, but the rule of comprehensiveness is a safeguard against mistakes and rigidity. Secondly, dialectical logic requires that an object should be taken in development, in change, in 'self-movement' (as Hegel sometimes puts it) ... Thirdly, a full 'definition' of an object must include the whole of human experience, both as a criterion of truth and a practical indicator of its connection with human wants. Fourthly, dialectical logic holds that 'truth is always concrete, never abstract', as the late Plekhanov liked to say after Hegel. (Let me add in parenthesis for the benefit of young Party members that you *cannot* hope to become a *real*, intelligent Communist without making a study – and I mean *study* – of all of Plekhanov's philosophical writings, because nothing better has been written on Marxism anywhere in the world.)⁶¹

Here we have it, on the one hand, a rich definition of the concrete that was hardly empirical only, that involved change, even self-movement, and if we are talking about human beings, that would include the conscious self-movement of an oppressed collective subject. Moreover, the discussion of connections and mediations certainly suggested a notion of totality.

On the other hand, the final parenthesis threw off readers interested in a new, creative concept of dialectics, as the recourse to Plekhanov takes us back toward the not very dialectical materialism of that founder of Russian Marxism. (It also acknowledged Plekhanov as the source of the concept that truth is concrete.) And of course, Lenin never publicly referred to him as a 'vulgar materialist' as he had done so forcefully in his private Hegel Notebooks. This contradiction, which does not become fully visible without an actual study of those Notebooks, is a prime example of what Dunayevskaya termed Lenin's philosophical ambivalence, a concept that became central to *Lenin, Hegel, and Western Marxism* as well. The concept of philosophical ambivalence was an attempt to account for issues like these continuing references to Plekhanov and the republication of *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*, while suggesting

61 Lenin 1965a, p. 94. In an article that makes a similar argument to that of Oittinen, Nathan Coombs takes up this passage, acknowledging that here Lenin 'is more obviously influenced by his reading of the *Logic*' (2016, p. 12).

that Lenin's private views may have been less 'orthodox' than he maintained in public to his more mechanical materialist comrades, as he had to choose his battles carefully. One recent commentator has written polemically that in asserting this view of a Lenin who might have been privately more dialectical, more Hegelian, and above all, more critical of his contemporaries like Trotsky and Bukharin on the dialectic than he was in public, 'Dunayevskaya and Anderson are even forced to lean toward the conspiratorial'.⁶² It was nothing of the kind, but rather an attempt to grapple with what seemed to be the obviously contradictory quality of Lenin's writings on dialectics after 1914, as seen in the very texts that the critics of the Lenin-Hegel interpretation bring to the fore.

6 Dialectics and Lenin's Theoretical Works after 1914: Did He Really Reorganise His Thinking?

Lenin's Hegel Notebooks, as I have argued in the present book, formed the philosophical underpinnings of his better-known writings during the years 1915–17 on imperialism and national liberation, and on the state and revolution. Hegelian dialectics, the present book maintained, influenced one of the great social revolutions of modern times via its principal leader and theorist. Above all, Lenin's study of Hegel and dialectics formed the philosophical ground for his post-1914 break with the more mechanistic, ultimately reformist Marxism of the Second International and helped propel him toward the really revolutionary break of November 1917. This was because Lenin's plunge into Hegel helped him to reorganise his thinking in the wake of the greatest crisis Marxism had undergone up to that time, the collapse of the Second International in the face of World War I.

This interpretation attempted to convey something very important, above all the practicality of dialectics, at least for Lenin.

I also suggested that Lenin's example showed that all those aspiring to revolution needed to delve into Hegel and dialectics. This has been especially the case at times when Marxism was in deep crisis, whether in 1914, or at the time of the Hitler-Stalin Pact of 1939, or after Russia suppressed the Hungarian Revolution of 1956, or after the 1989–91 collapse of the USSR when Marxism was widely declared dead, even on the left.

But what if there were no major theoretical break with the Marxism of the Second International on Lenin's part in 1914–15? In that case, his Hegel studies

62 Coombs 2016, p. 12.

would become somewhat less important, even if they did mark a philosophical break with the more mechanical materialism of the Second International as carried on within Bolshevism most notably by Bukharin. This is another road through which the Lenin-Hegel interpretation has been challenged of late.

Lars Lih, whose translated and annotated edition of *What Is To Be Done?* has made an important contribution, has introduced the notion of an 'aggressive unoriginality'⁶³ in Lenin's writings in 1914–16. Lih has argued that Lenin remained theoretically a follower of the pre-1910 Kautsky. He holds that Lenin saw Kautsky not as an example of a flawed Marxism developed ever since Marx's death in 1883, but as having been for decades an exemplary Marxist thinker who in 1914 tragically betrayed his lifelong Marxist principles by supporting World War I, those same principles that Lenin still sought to uphold. It is on this basis that Lih has maintained that there was nothing original about Lenin's writings on the war, or his book *Imperialism* and the writings on national liberation that accompanied it.

To be sure, as a member of the Second International, Lenin had been strongly influenced by Kautsky, who after the death of Engels in 1895 became its leading Marxist theorist. Kautsky helped create the language of Marxism that Lenin adopted and used. It would therefore be absurd to claim that Lenin suddenly jettisoned all of that language and all of those concepts. Nonetheless, *Lenin, Hegel, and Western Marxism* argued that Lenin moved decisively beyond that language and those concepts after 1914, that it was a real theoretical break, not just a political one with Kautsky.

Moreover, even if Lih is correct in his argument that Lenin saw himself as merely repeating the Kautsky of 1909 versus Kautsky the betrayer of 1914, which I seriously doubt, that in itself would still be no reason to dismiss the Hegel Notebooks. For as Dunayevskaya wrote in the first substantial analysis of them in English, Lenin must have been asking, 'What were the objective causes for such total ideological collapse? The fact was overwhelming, totally unforeseen, incontrovertible. Confronted with the appearance of counter-revolution *within* the revolutionary movement, Lenin was driven to search for a philosophy that would reconstitute his own reason'.⁶⁴ From such a perspective, Lenin began in 1914 to examine not only why Kautsky or others had betrayed, but the conceptual roots of that betrayal. Something must have been rotten in the whole organisational and theoretical system of the Second International for it to transform into its opposite in just a few years, abandoning its anti-war and internationalist stance.

63 Lenin 2006; Lih 2016, p. 412.

64 Dunayevskaya 1958, p. 168.

For his part, Lih offered no explanation of why Lenin delved into Hegel at such length and with such intensity in the months immediately after the outbreak of war and what he saw as the betrayal of Marxist principles by those to whom he had looked for theoretical guidance on the major issues in Marxist theory and practice.

Lih's argument concerning Lenin's lack of theoretical originality was not entirely new. As mentioned above, it was a staple of Cold War Russian studies in the West, which saw him as a manipulative organisation man whose sole original contribution was the concept of a highly disciplined and centralised revolutionary vanguard party. Even those with much more respect for Lenin as a thinker, like Tony Cliff and Neil Harding, saw Lenin's book *Imperialism* as not really very original, but a popular manual that followed in many respects Bukharin's earlier book from 1915. Nonetheless, they, especially Cliff, still viewed *Imperialism* as a break with the Marxism of the Second International. The provocatively new argument Lih advanced lay in the assertion that Lenin remained a theoretical follower of the pre-1910 Kautsky during the entire period spanning 1914–16 and much of 1917. Only with *State and Revolution*, written in the second half of 1917, did Lenin break away theoretically into original territory. Thus, Lenin's key writings of 1914–17 on war, imperialism, and national liberation were repeating Kautsky and were not imbued with anything very new, let alone a new sense of dialectics drawn from the Hegel Notebooks. If correct, Lih's interpretation would undercut the central argument of the present book, but as I will show below, Lih missed core differences between Kautsky's pre-1910 writings and Lenin's after 1914, especially in terms of national liberation and the peasantry.

The most original aspect of Lih's argument was a detailed presentation of Kautsky as a proto-Lenin before 1910, as a revolutionary Marxist thinker who largely mapped out the theories of national liberation that Lenin was to develop after 1914. I am stressing national liberation here because Kautsky, unlike Luxemburg, Lenin, and Bukharin, did not write a major treatise on imperialism and therefore it would be harder to compare his theorisation of imperialism before 1910 with that of Lenin's *Imperialism* (1916). Even though Lih introduces some important evidence and makes some interesting arguments, he seriously exaggerates the affinities between Kautsky and Lenin.

Let us recall some of Lenin's positions on imperialism and national liberation and then compare them with Kautsky's. One way to see these in condensed form is in the language of point eight of the well-known twenty-one 'Conditions of Admission to the Communist International' of 1920, written under the strong influence of Lenin:

In countries whose bourgeoisies possess colonies and oppress other nations, it is necessary that the parties have an especially clear and well-defined position on the question of the colonies and oppressed nations. Every party wishing to belong to the Communist International is obligated to expose the tricks of 'its own' imperialists in the colonies, to support every liberation movement in the colonies not only in words but in deeds, to demand that the imperialists of its country be driven out of these colonies, to instill in the hearts of the workers of its country a truly fraternal attitude toward the laboring people in the colonies and toward the oppressed nations, and to conduct systematic agitation among its country's troops against all oppression of colonial peoples.⁶⁵

This forceful statement advocating active resistance to imperialism and unwavering support for anti-imperialist movements did not come out of the blue, but was the result of long and sometimes acrimonious debates that Lenin had engaged in from 1915 onwards, not only with reformists or those he termed centrists, but also with fellow revolutionaries like Bukharin, Luxemburg, and Trotsky.

In this regard, Lenin's writings on Ireland's 1916 Easter Uprising in relation to those of other revolutionary Marxists were particularly revealing. Karl Radek, close to Lenin by then but still holding a Luxemburgist position rejecting all forms of nationalism as reactionary, helped to launch the Marxist debate over the Easter Uprising. In a polemical article of May 1916, 'Their Song Is Played Out', Radek wrote that the Irish peasants were no longer the revolutionary force they had been in Marx's time, as they had been bought off by economic concessions. The current uprising had a more conservative agenda. In a major political misjudgment, Radek added: 'This movement, called "Sinn Fein", was a purely urban petty-bourgeois movement' with 'little social backing'. Therefore, Ireland had experienced not a revolutionary uprising, but a 'putsch that the British government easily disposed of'.⁶⁶

As a Luxemburgist on the national question, Radek would have differed with Kautsky on national self-determination before 1914. However, the case of Trotsky should be more instructive in terms of whether Lenin's position on national liberation had changed after 1914. Like Lenin a member of the left wing of the Second International, Trotsky had not articulated any major differences with Kautsky before the 1914 betrayal and he too, like Lenin, sought to uphold revolu-

65 Comintern 1991, p. 768.

66 Radek 1984, p. 375.

tionary Marxism after 1914. Moreover, Trotsky had been far closer to Kautsky personally than Lenin, and perhaps theoretically as well.⁶⁷ Of course, Trotsky did not do what Lenin, uniquely among the leaders of the revolutionary left, had done, deeply study Hegel and dialectics during the crisis of Marxism brought about by the war. But if, as Lih has argued, Lenin did not change fundamentally during the period of rethinking that included most prominently his Hegel studies, then Trotsky's views should have been similar to Lenin's on Ireland, since both of them would have remained theoretically Kautskyian by 1916.

Let us look then at Trotsky's article on Ireland, published two months after Radek's, in July 1916, which was certainly not one of his best performances. Similarly to Radek, he concluded that nationalism as a political force was spent, that the 'historical basis for a national revolution has disappeared even in backward Ireland', calling the rebels 'nationalist dreamers'.⁶⁸ This was in large part because the poor peasant base of the progressive Irish nationalism of Marx's time had disappeared once British 'agrarian legislation' at the end of the nineteenth century transferred land to the peasants and as a result, 'the farmers were transformed into conservative petty proprietors'.⁶⁹ To be sure, Trotsky added, nationalism within the Irish working class was understandable, given 'the egotistically narrow and imperially arrogant trade unionism of Britain', which made class unity across the two islands more difficult. However, such nationalist uprisings were not the solution, and Easter 1916 represented 'the outworn hopes and methods of the past'.⁷⁰ The future lay with the class struggle and the internationalisation of the trade union movement. Thus, the growth of imperialism and the concomitant centralisation of capital – and the changing class situation of the peasantry – were increasingly making obsolete the kind of nationalist uprisings in countries dominated by imperialism that took place in Ireland in 1916. At an empirical level, this was a huge error, as Ireland not only won partial independence within a few years, but was an early example of what was to become a major revolutionary force in the twentieth century throughout the Global South: anti-colonial movements with a leftist or a socially progressive colouration.

Lenin contributed to the debate over Ireland with a very different analysis a few months later, in the autumn of 1916, as part of a lengthy article on national self-determination. In 1915–16, with very few allies even among other revolu-

67 Broué 1988, p. 137.

68 Trotsky 1984, p. 372.

69 Trotsky 1984, p. 373.

70 Trotsky 1984, p. 373.

tionary Marxists, he had been arguing for what he saw as a more dialectical view: Imperialism strengthened capitalism to be sure, but it also exhibited an internal contradiction, whereby oppressed nations and peoples were rising up in resistance. If that resistance took a progressive form – that of a national liberation movement – it could become an ally, not a competitor, of the global socialist and labour movements of the imperialist countries. Easter 1916 gave Lenin the concrete example he was seeking. He attacked Radek's notion that the uprising had a narrow social base, calling such arguments a 'doctrinaire' dismissal of the evidence of a mass movement that had been building in the months before Easter. Rather than a throwback to the past, Easter 1916 was a harbinger of the future, of the crisis that global capitalism was sure to undergo in the aftermath of the war. 'It is the misfortune of the Irish that they rose prematurely', he wrote. Conceptually, Lenin's term 'prematurely' ran in exactly the opposite direction from Trotsky's 'outworn hopes and methods of the past'. 'Prematurely' indicated something that was not yet fully developed, but perhaps a forerunner of revolutions to come. Lenin then generalised about the dialectical relationship of Easter 1916 to the global revolutionary movement: 'The dialectics of history are such that small nations, powerless as an *independent* factor in the struggle against imperialism, play a part as one of the ferments, one of the bacilli, which help the *real* anti-imperialist force, the socialist proletariat, to make its appearance on the scene'.⁷¹ Here, Lenin seemed to be suggesting that the Irish and other national liberation movements, even if doing so 'prematurely', could anticipate, could help bring forward, could even be, in a certain sense, the vanguard or point of departure of the global socialist and anti-imperialist revolution. However, Lenin had still not reached to the level of Marx and Engels in their 1882 formulation about Russian peasants and the Western proletariat: 'If the Russian revolution becomes the signal for a proletarian revolution in the West, so that the two complement each other, then Russia's peasant communal landownership may serve as the point of departure for a communist development'.⁷² Here Marx and Engels saw a real complementarity between the two types of struggle, in addition to, as Lenin did, viewing strata outside the core capitalist countries as possible vanguards.⁷³

However, Lenin came closer to the late Marx's position by 1920, in a speech to the Second Congress of the Comintern on national and colonial issues:

71 Lenin 1964a, p. 357.

72 Marx and Engels 1983, p. 139.

73 I have discussed this in detail in Anderson 2016.

[T]he Communist International's theses should point out that peasants' Soviets, Soviets of the exploited, are a weapon which can be employed, not only in capitalist countries but also in countries with pre-capitalist relations, and that it is the absolute duty of Communist parties and of elements prepared to form Communist parties, everywhere to conduct propaganda in favour of peasants' Soviets or of working people's Soviets, this to include backward and colonial countries. Wherever conditions permit, they should at once make attempts to set up Soviets of the working people Not only should we create independent contingents of fighters and party organisations in the colonies and the backward countries, not only at once launch propaganda for the organisation of peasants' Soviets and strive to adapt them to the pre-capitalist conditions, but the Communist International should advance the proposition, with the appropriate theoretical grounding, that with the aid of the proletariat of the advanced countries, backward countries can go over to the Soviet system and, through certain stages of development, to communism, without having to pass through the capitalist stage.⁷⁴

Here, Lenin underlined the subjectivity of the peasant masses as a crucial and ongoing element of the global revolutionary struggle, in a world where the vast majority of working people were still peasants. Not only that, peasant-based revolutions, it was suggested, could move to socialism, not merely democracy, if they could find allies in working class revolutions in the industrialised countries.

What of Kautsky? As emphasized by Lih, in *Road to Power* (1909), Kautsky's most revolutionary work, he wrote of growing resistance to Western imperialism, both from states like Japan and Turkey, and from below. Kautsky concluded that 'they are fighting the same enemy the European proletariat is fighting'.⁷⁵ He added that whereas the *Communist Manifesto* of 1848 concentrated on Western Europe, by 1909 the 'field of battle of the proletarian revolution ... has become the whole world. Today, the battles in the liberation struggle of laboring and exploited humanity are being fought not only at the Spree River and the Seine, but also at the Hudson and the Mississippi, at the Neva and the Dardanelles, at the Ganges and the Hoangho'.⁷⁶ These sentences marked Kautsky's high point in terms of recognition of the importance of national liberation

74 Lenin 1966b, pp. 243–4.

75 Kautsky 1996, p. 83.

76 Kautsky 1996, p. 91.

movements in the colonies and of the notion that supporting them was a key point for socialists in the West.

But there were also some limitations here as compared to Lenin's positions after 1914. First, unlike Lenin, Kautsky wrote explicitly that in rising up against imperialism, the anti-colonial forces 'are not by any means doing so to the same end'⁷⁷ as the proletariat of the West, whereas Lenin saw more of a coalescence of forces and, to an extent, aims.

Second, Kautsky concluded in high-handed fashion that 'the elite of the [Western] proletariat today' needs to achieve victory against capitalism and then place itself 'at the head of civilization' in order to 'guide the immense economic transformations that will finally, over the entire globe, put an end to all the misery arising out of subjection, exploitation, and ignorance'.⁷⁸ Instead, Lenin saw the Irish national uprising as 'premature', something quite different. For this suggested that such struggles were not vestiges of the past, but could anticipate those by the Western proletariat, acting as a sort of vanguard.

Third, Kautsky kept his analysis of national liberation movements at a very general level. Of course, the Easter Uprising had not yet occurred, but in the years immediately preceding 1909, Iran had exploded in a major revolution, something he was familiar with already from his correspondence in 1907 with Iranian socialists.⁷⁹ But Kautsky mentioned neither Iran's epochal Constitutional Revolution of 1906–11 nor any other concrete revolutionary struggle in the Global South. This may be related to one of Lenin's attacks – in his above-cited discussion of Easter 1916 – on Kautsky, Trotsky, and the Menshevik Julius Martov. Their problem, he wrote, was that 'they hypocritically recognise self-determination' but keep their support abstract, 'without bothering to fight for the freedom of secession'.⁸⁰ This was likely connected philosophically to Lenin's attacks on Kantian abstractions in the Hegel Notebooks, and to his related notion that the Irish uprising revealed something about the dialectics of history, wherein abstract, global notions like socialist internationalism had to be concretised or mediated in dialectical fashion in order to take account of particularities like national and colonial oppression and resistance.

Fourth and most important, Kautsky saw anti-imperialist resistance by both rulers and working people in the colonies as allied with the struggle of the European working classes. But the working people in the colonies he had in mind seem to have been industrial and urban workers rather than peasants,

77 Kautsky 1996, p. 83.

78 Kautsky 1996, p. 91.

79 Riddell 1984, pp. 59–61; for a discussion see Afary 1996, pp. 242–6.

80 Lenin 1964a, pp. 359–60.

still the vast majority in the Global South. This is seen in how Kautsky emphasised 'the export of means of production' to non-European societies to create an industrial 'capitalist mode of production' as the new element in the type of imperialism that arose in the late nineteenth century.⁸¹ This was empirically erroneous as a generalisation, given the overall lack of industrialisation in the European colonies and semi-colonies. A deeper problem lay behind this empirical error, however, rooted in Kautsky's theory of the peasantry, which was shared to an extent by Trotsky as well.

Kautsky, like his fellow German Social Democratic leaders, tended to follow Ferdinand Lassalle on this issue rather than Marx, who had attacked Lassalle over the peasantry in the *Critique of the Gotha Program*. In the Lassallean tradition, the peasantry was a uniformly reactionary force, a type of discourse used even today by parts of the left, over issues like why many rural areas supported Trump in 2016 or the nature of the Yellow Vests movement in France. This attitude was found in *Road to Power* even as Kautsky wrote of working and oppressed people in the colonies, but without specifically mentioning the peasantry. For example, Kautsky offered the following generalisations on the European peasantry in *Road to Power*. He recounted that socialists, following Marx and Engels, 'formerly' saw the 'small-holder peasants as allies', as a stratum that they 'could attract, to interest in our revolutionary goals'.⁸² But, Kautsky concluded, socialists in various Western European countries had 'tried their luck with the peasants using this approach, without success', writing further that 'our Marxist "fanatic dogmatism"' had created an unfortunate delay in grasping this reality of the non-revolutionary peasant.⁸³ What did this mean for societies in the Global South where the peasants remained the vast majority?

A related issue concerns Kautsky's view that those entering the working class after having lost their positions in the 'smallholder peasantry' were more backward in their social consciousness than more experienced workers, because these ex-peasants retained nostalgia for the past and 'do not feel they are proletarians, but would-be property owners' who 'save their money to buy a bit of land'.⁸⁴ Why yearning for non-alienated labour on a small family farm would completely obviate revolutionary class consciousness was not clear. Here, Kautsky's analysis also seemed to differ with what Lenin emphasised in 1916 in the wake of the betrayal of the Second International, the need 'to go down

81 Kautsky 1996, p. 81.

82 Kautsky 1996, p. 72.

83 Kautsky 1996, p. 73.

84 Kautsky 1996, p. 50.

lower and deeper to the real masses'⁸⁵ of the poorest and most exploited workers in the face of pro-imperialist sentiment among the better off parts of the working classes. Some of these better off workers formed, he wrote, a 'labour aristocracy'⁸⁶ that had gone over to the side of capital. Surely former peasants would have been among those deeper layers, among them Irish peasants driven by famine or other forms of dispossession into the bottom strata of the British working class, or African American sharecroppers migrating north to work in the harshest industrial jobs in Chicago and Detroit. If such workers also dreamed of a return to their home towns and villages, what of it? More generally, the small layer of industrial workers in the Global South that Kautsky referred to, most of them recent former peasants, would, according to his above reasoning, have lacked the full class consciousness of long-urbanised workers.

A clear difference with Lenin's position on the peasantry, which also bore on the whole issue of anti-colonial resistance and revolution, could be seen in point five of the 1920 Comintern conditions of admission:

Systematic and consistent agitation must be carried out in the countryside. The working class cannot be victorious unless it has the support of the rural proletariat and at least a part of the poorest peasants and has, through its policies, neutralized part of the remaining rural population. At the present time, communist work in the countryside is gaining exceptional importance. It must be carried out principally by revolutionary Communist *workers* of town and country who have ties with the countryside. To renounce this work or to leave it in unreliable, semireformist hands is tantamount to renouncing the proletarian revolution.⁸⁷

This position was in line with what Lenin had written about Easter 1916 and national liberation and even more so in his 1920 remarks about peasant soviets. It marked a major difference with Kautsky.

Thus, some key differences manifested themselves between the pre-1910 Kautsky and Lenin after 1914 on national liberation and on a closely related issue, the peasantry. Kautsky in 1909 gave more qualified, hesitant support to anti-colonial liberation movements while seeing the Western proletariat taking the lead among the world's working people. In contrast, Lenin penned far

85 Lenin 1964b, p. 120.

86 Lenin 1964b, p. 116.

87 Comintern 1991, p. 767.

more substantial analyses of national liberation movements in the colonial and semi-colonial world, and in his 1916 writings on Ireland, stressed that Irish liberation fighters were ahead of the Western working classes in moving against the system. This was related to key differences between Lenin's positions on the peasantry after 1914 and those of Kautsky in 1909.

In the years 1914–17, Lenin examined the roots of the betrayal and largely found that Marxism needed to be reconstructed, even refounded. First, he grappled with Hegel and dialectics in order to give his revolutionary Marxism a proper philosophical foundation, this versus the vulgar materialism and neo-Kantianism into which the leading Marxist theorists had fallen. Then he explored a core problem Marxists had been debating and theorising for nearly two decades, imperialism, resulting in his 1916 book, while also considering its dialectical opposite or contradiction, national liberation. Third, he explored the nature of revolution and of the new society in *State and Revolution* and also attempted briefly to practice these theories in Soviet Russia after 1917. Let us turn briefly to that theory and practice.

7 The Antinomies of *State and Revolution*

With *State and Revolution*, the link to Hegel and dialectics was less explicit, but the overall framework of this work was clearly dialectical. Lenin was inspired by Marx's *Civil War in France*, which had hardly been central to Marxist debates in the Second International, at least since the days of Eleanor Marx (1855–98). In *State and Revolution*, which did not cover Russia, and in a series of articles from the second half of 1917 that did so, Lenin traced the growth of the modern centralised state and, alongside it, the emergence of revolutionary movements that were both antistatist and anticapitalist. Here, he cut against the dominant perspectives of the Second International, whose leading theorists had seen the modern centralised state and the centralisation of the economy under monopoly capitalism as a step toward socialism. For Lenin, the modern state was instead the biggest obstacle to revolution, yet at the same time was riven with contradictions in truly dialectical fashion. In addition to the direct working-class democracy of the Paris Commune that Marx extolled in the *Civil War in France*, Lenin focused on the Russian soviets, the revolutionary councils that workers, peasants, and soldiers/sailors created from below in 1905 and on a much larger scale in 1917. He called for direct rule by the soviets as a form of proletarian democracy that reached down to the deepest grassroots, rather than a parliamentary democracy, sometimes castigating his own Bolshevik Party for not keeping up with the revolutionary ardour of the masses.

This was to be a non-state. Summarising *Civil War in France*, Lenin wrote, 'all previous revolutions perfected the state machine, whereas it must be broken, smashed'.⁸⁸ Here is how he sketched the new administration in *State and Revolution*, written on the eve of November 1917:

The workers, after winning political power, will smash the old bureaucratic apparatus, shatter it to its very foundations and raze it to the ground; they will replace it by a new one, consisting of the very same workers and other employees, *against* whose transformation into bureaucrats the measures will at once be taken which were specified in detail by Marx and Engels: (1) not only election, but also recall at any time, (2) pay not to exceed that of a workman; (3) immediate introduction of control and supervision by *all*, so that *all* may become 'bureaucrats' for a time, and that, therefore, *nobody* may be able to become a 'bureaucrat'.⁸⁹

As Žižek noted recently, reminding us of the gendered dimension of a famous Lenin formulation that is missing in the usual English translations, 'he outlined his vision of the workers' state where every *kukharka* (not simply a cook, and especially not a great chef, but more a modest woman servant in the kitchen of a wealthy family) will have to learn how to rule'.⁹⁰ Underlining how he was targeting all Marxists who still looked to form a state, another new aspect was an attack on the reformist socialists for having expelled anarchists but not supporters of imperialism from their ranks.

The vision of a socialist society elaborated in *State and Revolution* seemed to have been aimed at an international, particularly German, Marxist audience rather than only a Russian one. Lenin had arranged for it to be translated into German and French by 1918, ahead of any of his other theoretical works. His new fame as leader of the Russian Revolution, and the book itself, have made Marx's *Civil War in France* a core text in the Marxist canon ever since, especially around the issue of smashing as opposed to merely taking over the modern capitalist state. For this alone, Lenin should be remembered and read today.

However, the legacy of *State and Revolution* constituted, at another level, that of the practice of Lenin and the Bolsheviks, among the most ambivalent, troubling aspects of their legacy. For within less than a year of coming to power,

88 Lenin 1964c, p. 411.

89 Lenin 1964c, p. 486.

90 Žižek 2017, p. 172.

they had largely sidelined the soviets and moved to set up a centralised, one-party state. Those hostile to Marxism and who espouse the notion that there is no viable alternative to capitalism have often seen this legacy as proof for their arguments. It is said that Lenin committed a giant fraud upon the Russian people, as he never intended to implement *State and Revolution*. There is no evidence to support these kinds of allegations. Or it is said that 1917 and its aftermath shows that any attempt to transcend capitalism leads to disaster, which is why there is no alternative. Here, the opponents of Lenin and of any kind of truly radical revolution – among them most liberals and social democrats – point to the murderous oppressiveness of the Stalin system and/or to the Soviet Union's collapse in 1991 as proof that any such experiments are doomed to failure. Of course, such arguments would leave intact one of the most destructive and potentially catastrophic systems the world has ever seen, capitalism. Leaving aside the danger capitalism presents of evolving into fascism when under stress, even its 'normal' liberal democratic version not only exploits the working class, but has also produced enough thermonuclear weapons to destroy most life on the planet in a matter of hours, while it has also degraded the environment to the point that human survival is also in question from that direction.

To most readers of this book, Luxemburg's critique of Lenin, penned from her German prison cell in 1918, probably has more resonance than conservative or liberal attacks on the very idea of socialist revolution. Luxemburg had been jailed for opposing German militarism, and had broken with Kautsky in 1910–11, four years ahead of Lenin or Trotsky, over his failure to come out against the Social Democratic Party's opportunism in the face of German imperialism. Luxemburg hailed the November 1917 revolution in Russia, but at the same time, criticised strongly the new state it had established. She praised the Bolsheviks for pushing ahead rapidly, defying both lingering pro-war sentiment and reformist gradualism:

... these German Social-Democrats have sought to apply to revolutions the home-made wisdom of the parliamentary nursery: in order to carry anything, you must first have a majority ... The true dialectic of revolutions, however, stands this wisdom of parliamentary moles on its head: not through a majority to revolutionary tactics, but through revolutionary tactics to a majority – that's the way the road runs. Only a party which knows how to lead, that is, to advance things, wins support in stormy times. The determination with which, at the decisive moment, Lenin and his comrades offered the only solution which could advance things ('all power in the hands of the proletariat and peasantry'), transformed them

almost overnight from a persecuted, slandered, outlawed minority whose leader had to hide like Marat in cellars, into the absolute master of the situation.⁹¹

Luxemburg commended such audacity, adherence to revolutionary principles, and actual implementation of revolutionary measures.

But she also raised a note of caution about the political form of a single-party state led by the Bolshevik Party, by now having renamed itself the Communist Party:

Freedom only for the supporters of the government, only for the members of one party – however numerous they may be – is no freedom at all. Freedom is always and exclusively freedom for the one who thinks differently. Not because of any fanatical concept of ‘justice’ but because all that is instructive, wholesome and purifying in political freedom depends on this essential characteristic, and its effectiveness vanishes when ‘freedom’ becomes a special privilege.⁹²

This was her most immortal line, frequently quoted today not only as a criticism of Lenin and Trotsky, but also as an indication of what a radically anticapitalist but democratic revolution might look like.

Nor, as some have supposed, was Luxemburg a purist who eschewed all harsh tactics. She recognised full well that Lenin and Trotsky, like the liberal Abraham Lincoln before them, had resorted in the midst of civil war to tactics that went against core democratic principles. If these were merely temporary measures, they would not be fatal to the endeavour of establishing a Soviet Russia. But that was not the case: ‘The danger begins only when they make a virtue of necessity and want to freeze into a complete theoretical system all the tactics forced upon them by these fatal circumstances, and want to recommend them to the international proletariat as a model of socialist tactics’.⁹³ Luxemburg also recognised that such measures came about in part due to the weakness and isolation of Soviet Russia. For this, she blamed not Lenin and Trotsky so much as the larger socialist parties of the industrialised countries for leaving it in the lurch: ‘It is not Russia’s unripeness which has been proved by the events of the war and the Russian Revolution, but the unripeness of the German proletariat

91 Luxemburg 2004, p. 289.

92 Luxemburg 2004, p. 305.

93 Luxemburg 2004, p. 309.

for the fulfillment of its historic tasks'.⁹⁴ For like Lenin and Trotsky, she never envisioned anything like the bizarre Stalinist theory of socialism in one country, wherein socialism became a fig leaf for rapid capital accumulation on the backs of the working people in what amounted to a state-capitalist system. Nonetheless, the single-party state, which flowed out of Lenin's concept of a vanguard party to lead, had already reared its head years before Stalin assumed power in the late 1920s.

These issues alone point to problems associated with *State and Revolution*, making it harder to see the book as a theoretical model given how its author practised revolution after 1917.

Nonetheless, if *State and Revolution* could be considered as a purely theoretical text, leaving aside Bolshevik practice after 1917, it would remain a highly original work, worthy of study and concretisation today. That is what I argued in the original edition of this book.

However, even considered solely as a theoretical work, I now see two significant problems in *State and Revolution*, ones I did not perceive at the time of the first edition of this book. First, Lenin may have minimised the importance of a vanguard party in the heady revolutionary days of 1917, but even in *State and Revolution*, he never abandoned it. This undermines the claims of some like Louis Menashe (1973), who held in an otherwise very illuminating analysis of changes in Lenin's thought, that he had become a spontaneist with affinities to anarchism. For within *State and Revolution* one finds, amid all the language about smashing the state and initiative from below, the following line, almost an aside: 'By educating the workers' party, Marxism educates the vanguard of the proletariat, capable of assuming power and leading the whole people to socialism, of directing and organising the new system, of being the teacher, the guide, the leader of all the working and exploited people in organising their social life without the bourgeoisie and against the bourgeoisie'.⁹⁵ This sentence suggests that Lenin, despite his rethinking of basic concepts after 1914, never wavered from the vanguard party concept. This continuity was evident three years later in the language of point twelve of the Comintern Conditions for Admission, which called for 'democratic centralism' in Communist Parties 'organized in the most centralized way possible and governed by iron discipline'.⁹⁶ These related notions, of a party constituting (or at least declaring itself) the vanguard of the revolution and of an ultra-centralist iron discipline within that party, subsequently helped to take Soviet Russia down the road toward an

94 Luxembourg 2004, p. 283.

95 Lenin 1964c, p. 409.

96 Comintern 1991, p. 769.

authoritarian and then a totalitarian state. None of this is intended to equate those parts of the anti-Stalinist revolutionary left that have adhered to the Leninist concept of the party, let alone Lenin himself, with Stalin's totalitarian dictatorship, or to suggest that one led inevitably to the other. I merely want to argue that this form of revolutionary organisation contained elements that can lead in that direction if it gains power in a revolution.

A second theoretical problem concerns how Lenin envisioned the shape of the new socialist society in *State and Revolution*, an issue I did not consider in the first edition of this book but that has been put forward recently by Peter Hudis (2017, 2019), Paresh Chattopadhyay (2016), and Nick Rogers (2018). This problem emerges when one considers the relationship among three issues, the dictatorship of the proletariat, the first phase of communism, and the second phase of communism, as these concepts were elaborated by Marx in *Critique of the Gotha Program* and Lenin in *State and Revolution*. In Marx, these seemed to be three different stages. First came the revolutionary dictatorship of (not over) the proletariat, which lay 'between capitalist and communist society' and in which the 'the state' still existed, while society was transitioning to communism.⁹⁷ Next came the first phase of communism, where the state had disappeared and people worked together cooperatively. They received remuneration – not wages, since under communism value production and capital had ceased to exist – based upon the 'duration or intensity' of their labor.⁹⁸ Thus, while social classes would have disappeared at this stage, along with the hierarchical division of labour, the cooperants were nonetheless to receive unequal remuneration, albeit not to the same degree as before in the capitalist wage and profit system. This was a temporary but necessary carry-over of some aspects of capitalist thinking. Society could not go at one fell swoop to a purer form of communism because law or 'right can never be higher than the economic structure of society or its cultural development'.⁹⁹ Beyond this came the last stage, the second phase of communism, where duration and intensity of labour no longer determined the remuneration of the cooperants, but society as a free association would be based upon the principle 'From each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs'.¹⁰⁰

As Hudis showed, in *State and Revolution*, Lenin 'muddled the waters'¹⁰¹ when he mixed together the dictatorship of the proletariat, a transitional stage

97 Marx 1989, p. 95.

98 Marx 1989, p. 86.

99 Marx 1989, p. 87.

100 Marx 1989, p. 87.

101 Hudis 2019, p. 770.

that had a state, with Marx's first phase of communism, which did not, and by calling this intermediate stage 'socialism'. Lenin did so not in a somewhat obscure paragraph but in a major section of the book. This had huge implications for the entire twentieth-century left, as it tied communism theoretically once again to the state, despite all the anti-statist language throughout the text of *State and Revolution*. Seriously misreading what Marx had said, Lenin wrote concerning the 'first phase of communist society': 'All citizens are transformed into hired employees of the state, which consists of the armed workers'.¹⁰² This type of society was 'usually called socialism', Lenin added parenthetically.¹⁰³ This 'socialism' or 'first phase of communism', Lenin wrote, was transitioning to a non-state. This was because, once 'all members of society, or at least the vast majority, have learned to administer the state themselves', then 'government of any kind begins to disappear altogether'.¹⁰⁴ Here he confused Marx's first phase of communism with the transitional society called the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat, which to Marx was still a state, unlike even the first phase of communism. Finally, Lenin wrote of the higher phase of communism that it is only here that society would experience 'the complete withering away of the state'.¹⁰⁵

Both of these theoretical problems in *State and Revolution* have had enduring consequences. Lenin's continued, even if muted, recourse to the vanguard party muddled the waters in terms of revolutionary organisation, preserving elitist forms that Lenin was in some respects transcending in late 1917, at least in practice. But the much more prominently placed interpretation of Marx on the post-capitalist society as still needing a state was seized upon not only by Stalin and Mao, but also by many other less authoritarian socialists, all of whom saw strengthening the state as a key step on the road toward communism. This allowed the debate over socialism to be narrowed to state vs. private property in the means of production, rather than being widened to include the fully autonomous, emancipated human being who nonetheless lives and works cooperatively in a community. This was what Marx in *Capital* called 'an association of free men [*Menschen*, could also be translated as human beings], working with the means of production held in common',¹⁰⁶ but twentieth-century socialist discourse submerged it. Here, Lenin shared theoretical as well as practical responsibility.

102 Lenin 1964c, p. 478.

103 Lenin 1964c, p. 472.

104 Lenin 1964c, p. 479.

105 Lenin 1964c, p. 479.

106 Marx 1976a, p. 171.

8 Which, If Any, Lenin for Today?

Summing up, three core contributions by Lenin stand out for today. One, Lenin was the first important Marxist leader after Marx to undertake an independent, systematic, and direct journey into Hegel's dialectical writings, this in his 1914–15 Hegel Notebooks. In so doing, he developed a philosophical foundation for the transcendence [*Aufheben*] of the Marxism of the Second International, mired as it was in reformism/opportunism and crude/mechanistic materialism. Unfortunately, Lenin kept his journey into Hegel largely to himself, creating an ambivalent legacy on Hegel and dialectics. Nonetheless, he left enough hints in his published writings on dialectics after 1914 to allow some Marxist philosophers to embark on a new direction beyond mechanical materialism, while the posthumous publication of the Hegel Notebooks gave even greater impetus to the elaboration of a truly dialectical and revolutionary Marxism. Unlike the more academicised versions of Western Marxism, Lenin's dialectics included a sketching of the chances for revolution, not only on the part of the working classes, but also by a variety of other forces, most prominently movements against colonial hegemony.

Two, Lenin created a new dialectical theory of imperialism and the whole era of monopoly capitalism. At one level, imperialism and monopoly meant a newer and stronger capitalism, with global reach, but this new stage of capitalism also disclosed new contradictions that pointed toward resistance, instability, and revolution. I have argued further that these insights owed something significant to the Hegel Notebooks. These new contradictions manifested themselves in particular in the flowering of national liberation movements, often based in predominantly agrarian societies with large peasantries in Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and Latin America. Lenin held that Marxists needed to support these movements unhesitatingly and forcefully. Moreover, he wrote that national liberation movements could under certain conditions step off ahead of the working classes in the struggle for a global revolution against capital. In a related context, Lenin also theorised the relationship of class to oppressed racial and national minorities within existing nations, arguing for linguistic and cultural autonomy, or even the right to secede from the nation state. Lenin's formulations on ethnicity and nation certainly had some limitations in practice, since in Russia these policies were often vitiated by the structure of a centralised one-party state. However, enough remained of this legacy as late as 2016, at least as an intellectual heritage, for Vladimir Putin to complain publicly that Lenin had placed a 'time bomb' under the Russian state due to a nationalities policy 'based on total equality along with the right of each to secede' and that this helped bring on the collapse of the

USSR.¹⁰⁷ Be that as it may, at a global level in his own time, Lenin's theory of imperialism and national liberation helped make Marxism into a truly international movement of both ideas and action.

Three, Lenin attempted in *State and Revolution* and related writings – with great insight and originality – to return Marxism to its founder's opposition to both capital and the state. In dialectical fashion likely linked to the Hegel Notebooks, the centralised modern capitalist state engendered grassroots democratic opposition from below, as seen in the Paris Commune and the Russian soviets. While this helped put a dent in statist Marxism, Lenin's own ambivalence, both theoretically and in practice after 1917, vitiated much of what he had achieved in this sphere.

Two more areas, both of them problematic, should also be mentioned. First, Lenin clung to the concept of the vanguard party to lead, first developed in 1902 under the strong influence of Kautsky¹⁰⁸ in *What Is To Be Done?* Although he modified the concept greatly in 1905 and 1917 under the impact of mass creativity from below, he never rejected it. Second, while Lenin wrote a lot about organisation, with some deleterious effects, and about national liberation, with some salutary ones, he wrote and said almost nothing of substance on gender and the family. To be sure, he supported women's emancipation and Soviet Russia was the first country to recognise many forms of women's rights, including legalised state-funded abortion, but Lenin made no original theoretical contribution in this sphere.

Looking back more than a century after Lenin's great moment, the Russian Revolution of 1917, he is someone we ignore at our peril, in terms of both the creative and the problematic features of his theoretical legacy. Despite Lenin's flaws, we as twenty-first century Marxists would be mistaken to dismiss his profound insights on issues like Hegel and dialectics, or imperialism and national liberation, or the state and revolution.

107 Mandraud 2016.

108 This Kautskyian influence was not first discovered by Lih in his edition (Lenin 2006), but was already central to an argument about Lenin's changing views after 1914 in Dunayevskaya (1958). However, Dunayevskaya saw this as a detrimental part of Lenin's legacy that needed to be largely rejected, except for the Leninist notion that membership in a Marxist organisation was to mean not only adherence to a set of theoretical and political principles, but also active participation in an organisation comprised of both workers and intellectuals.

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Introduction to the First Edition

This book paints a picture of Lenin different from the one found in most discussions of Marxism. Looking closely at his 1914–15 Hegel Notebooks, I will argue that Lenin's post-1914 work, especially on the dialectic, places him closer to key Hegelian or 'Western' Marxists such as Georg Lukács and the members of the Frankfurt School than to orthodox Marxists, including official Soviet Marxist-Leninists. I am by no means the first to argue this point, but I believe that this study is the first book-length treatment of Lenin to place such considerations at its centre.

In 1980 the prominent Marxist sociologist Alvin Gouldner pointed to two traditions within Marxist theory, which he termed critical and scientific Marxism. Gouldner placed a number of Hegelian, existentialist, and humanistic Marxists in the former category, while he located a group of structuralist Marxists in the latter. Far from placing Lenin among the scientific Marxists, as many lesser scholars would have done, Gouldner wrote: 'before Lukács and Korsch, it was Lenin who launched the movement toward a critical Marxism. (Launched but did not pursue it.)'¹ Gouldner was presumably referring both to Lenin's 1914–15 Hegel Notebooks *and* to his subsequent failure publicly to discuss them very much, a problem that the Hegelian Marxist Raya Dunayevskaya has termed Lenin's 'philosophic ambivalence'.² During the 1970s and early 1980s in the United States, and earlier in Europe, heated debates over the nature of Marxist theory raged among the various Marxist traditions that Gouldner had analysed as constituting these two Marxisms, especially in journals such as *Telos*, *New Left Review*, and *Theory and Society*.

By the 1990s the intellectual ground had shifted, and Marxism itself was increasingly being called into question even by radical intellectuals, not least because of the collapse of Communism in Eastern Europe and Russia. Marxism was deemed a failure at a political level because it had helped to bring about totalitarianism and economic collapse. Attacks were levelled not only at the authoritarian and vanguardist side of Lenin's thought but also at his more 'utopian' writings on the state and revolution, on direct democracy by soviets of workers, peasants, and soldiers. In 1991 the leftist theorist Martin Jay, best known for his work on the Frankfurt School, summed up some of these critiques of Marxism in a mordant essay entitled 'No Power to the Soviets'.

¹ Gouldner 1980, p. 47.

² See Dunayevskaya 1989 [1973], pp. 95–120.

Although he failed to address the side of Lenin's thought that advocates soviets, or workers' councils, Jay's essay sums up well some of the 1990s-era objections to radical revolution, even if it were from 'below' through direct democracy:

For Leninism was not the only socialist casualty of the recent events; no less called into question, at least implicitly, was another model of emancipatory organisation, and one which had occupied a central role in the socialist imaginary for more than a century. This alternative model was that of the workers council or soviet, which has often functioned as the utopian counterpoint to the 'realistic' Leninist stress on the party. Preserved in name only in the title of the Soviet Union, it remained nonetheless a vital rallying point for libertarian socialist critics of authoritarian, bureaucratic, statist communism. Rooted in the syndicalism of the 19th century, councils became historically important at various moments in the revolutions of our own – 1905 and 1917 in Russia, 1918 to 1920 in Germany, Austria and Italy, and 1956 in Hungary. ... But whatever the outcome [in Eastern Europe], it is clear that the old reliance on workers councils as the placeholder of redemption will no longer suffice.³

From this perspective, the concept of direct revolutionary democracy, which was current in the left at least since Marx's essay on the Paris Commune and is found in the writings of thinkers as diverse as Lenin, Luxemburg, and Anton Pannekoek – and which had reemerged not only in 1956 but also in 1968 in France, in 1975 in Portugal, and in 1979 in Iran (before the Islamic fundamentalist hijacking of that revolution) – was now, in the 1990s, suddenly to be consigned to oblivion. This mood grew in large part in response to poststructuralist attacks on the Marxist concept of the subject and on the notion of an apocalyptic, or revolutionary, moment. Although raising important issues such as identity, difference, and multiculturalism, poststructuralist theories left little room for any emancipatory theory in the Marxist sense.

At a more abstract level, the dialectic itself was under attack as never before. The American pragmatist and Heideggerian philosopher Richard Rorty, relying also on the poststructuralist argument, summed up many of these attacks on the dialectic in a piece published in 1992, 'Intellectuals and the End of Socialism': 'I hope we have reached a time when we can finally get rid of the conviction common to Plato and Marx, the conviction that there must be large theoretical ways of finding out how to end injustice, as opposed to small exper-

3 Jay 1990-1, pp. 65, 69.

imental ways. I hope we can learn to get along without the conviction that there is something deep – such as the human soul, or human nature, or the will of God, or the shape of history – which provides a subject matter for grand, politically useful theory'. Rorty wants to root out not only Marx's dialectic but the whole tradition of critical, dialectical thinking, going back to Plato. He concludes that no 'alternative to capitalism' exists and that therefore, 'the only hope for getting the money necessary to eliminate intolerable inequities is to facilitate the activities of people like Henry Ford ... and even Donald Trump'⁴

Such premature announcements of the death of Marxism are nearly as old as Marxism itself. Recently I ran across one such claim made nearly a century ago in an important French journal, *Revue de métaphysique et de morale*, where a leading 'specialist' on Hegel and Marx, now largely forgotten, wrote that he was 'compelled to proclaim Marxism obsolete'.⁵ A contrary view was expressed three decades ago by Jean-Paul Sartre, who argued that he saw only three real periods of philosophical creation since the sixteenth century. These were the 'moment' of Descartes and Locke, that of Kant and Hegel, and finally, that of Marx, in which, he held, we still live. One cannot go beyond Marx, Sartre maintained, without also going beyond the historical epoch out of which his thought emerged, namely, capitalism. Therefore, he wrote: 'A so-called "going beyond Marxism" will be at worst only a return to pre-Marxism'.⁶ Which is why, he concluded, its opponents so often have recourse to pre-Marxian notions such as eighteenth-century 'free-market' liberalism.

The critics of Hegelian and Marxist thought often suggest that we need to accept the 'permanence' of capitalism and its world economy, working within it through multiparty democracy or in small-scale social movements that would avoid the dangers of a 'totalising' perspective. I think that such critiques are in large part misplaced and represent more the capitulation of some radical intellectuals to the status quo than an accurate reading either of the history of Marxism or of the theoretical needs of the present moment. These arguments grew out of the retrogressive Reagan-Bush-Thatcher social agenda, which persisted for over a decade in the industrially developed countries, a development that was very discouraging to leftist intellectuals of all types. They also flowed out of the failure of either the Eastern European upheavals of 1989 or the Third World revolutions of the 1970s to create a viable 'third way' between totalitarian Communism and free-market capitalism. Thus, many grudgingly accepted that the Reagan-Bush agenda would prevail for many years to come.

4 Rorty 1992, p. 4.

5 See Andler 1897, p. 658.

6 Sartre 1963 [1957], p. 7.

By the early 1990s, however, as the fires of Los Angeles went off like a loud alarm clock in the American psyche, the Bush-Reagan mandate melted away overnight, as Blacks, Latinos, gay and lesbian activists, and above all, women found their voices. Communism and the Third World were not alone in facing crisis; Western capitalism was in the deepest crisis it had seen since the Great Depression, with unemployment at catastrophic levels once again, especially in Europe. Along with this came the rise of neo-fascist movements in Central and Western Europe and outright genocide in the former Yugoslavia and in Rwanda, with liberal democracy unwilling or incapable of taking a real stand against these horrific developments. In Latin America the year 1994 opened with an uprising by Indigenous peasants in Chiapas, Mexico, just as the Mexican government was celebrating its free-trade agreement with the United States. In 1994 the United States seemed to veer once again to the right. In the light of these deep crises, most of which are connected to the persistent, seemingly intractable world economic crisis, I believe that it is only a matter of time before, Rorty to the contrary, radical intellectuals begin to return to some form of the perspectives of Hegel and Marx.

Some of the thinking that went into this book really began two decades ago, in the 1970s. Like many student activists of the generation of 1968, I had read theoretical works by people such as Frantz Fanon, Herbert Marcuse, Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Rosa Luxemburg, Cornelius Castoriadis, and Guy Debord. Sometime later, in the early 1970s, I began to read Trotsky and Lenin, and I also came into contact with Raya Dunayevskaya, whose work on the relationship of Marxism to Hegel and to humanism has influenced me ever since. She introduced me to the work of Georg Lukács, Theodor Adorno, Karel Kosík, and, of course, Marx and Hegel.

By the 1970s translations of the works of leading European leftist philosophers and social theorists – from Adorno's work to the previously untranslated Marxist writings of the French existentialists, and from Lukács to Antonio Gramsci – plus new translations of Hegel and Marx, including for the first time the *Grundrisse*, helped to create a new level of discussion in the United States around issues such as the Critical Theory of the Frankfurt School and Hegelian Marxism. This book, which examines Lenin's Hegel Notebooks of 1914–15 in relation to his overall political and social theory, is a product of that intellectual ferment.

When this project began as a doctoral thesis under George Fischer and Michael E. Brown at City University of New York in 1979, I felt that it was important to look at Lenin's work anew for several reasons. First, although the discussion of Marx had long since broken away from the constraints of orthodox Marxism – within which I include Trotskyism and Maoism, as well as official

Soviet Marxist-Leninism – with few exceptions, discussions of Lenin's work had remained imprisoned within that orthodoxy or else took place among its equally ideological rivals, the US cold war sovietologists. There was a need to bring some of the perspectives of Hegelian Marxism to bear on Lenin's work, especially since he was the only important Marxist leader of his generation to have made an extensive study of Hegel. For example, Lenin's 'Abstract of Hegel's *Science of Logic*' (1914) runs some 150 pages in Volume 38 of his *Collected Works*.

Second, Lenin's 1914–15 Hegel studies preceded the return to Hegel in the early 1920s by key figures such as Lukács, Gramsci, and Karl Korsch, all of whom were in those years active in Lenin's Third International. The impact of Lenin's Hegel studies on their work needed to be assessed if we were to get a full understanding of the origins of Western Marxism.

Third, within contemporary Marxist social theory there was often a gulf between those who concerned themselves with issues such as imperialism or the state and those who were interested in dialectics or culture. A related problem is that too often, in the sociology of revolution, theorists have emphasised social structure in a deterministic fashion, looking at the sociology of social classes or of the state as their source of data on the 'causes' of revolution, with too little attention given to the political and social ideas that helped to shape and even inspire those events. It is surprising how little the writings of key revolutionaries who were also theorists, including not only Lenin but also Trotsky and Luxemburg, to name a few, have been utilised by those who write on the sociology of revolution.⁷ Lenin's Marxism of 1916–23 surely helped to 'make' history. I hoped that a new reading of Lenin's work from the vantage point of Hegelian Marxism would be able to pose some of these issues in a new light, since Lenin's theorising concerns itself with all these questions.

Fourth, although the Frankfurt School Critical Theorists and many other Western Marxists developed new concepts of dialectic and humanism within Marxism and criticised traditional notions of the working class, they were often not as successful in articulating a new concept of subjectivity to replace (or supplement) that of the traditional industrial working class. Lenin, in however flawed a fashion, had made the move from studies in the dialectic proper to

7 The best-known recent example of a state-centred approach in the sociology of revolution is Skocpol 1979. An interesting critique of the deterministic nature of such an approach has been made recently by Laitin and Warner 1992, pp. 147–51. They write that in Skocpol's work, 'no consideration is given that through political, military, or ideological action, Trotsky might have overcome, or at least transformed, structure' (p. 148). For an all too rare example of a sociologist of revolution taking seriously the ideas of a revolutionary theorist, in this case also Trotsky, see Burawoy 1989, pp. 759–805.

the conceptualisation of new forms of subjectivity. For example, after reading Hegel, he began to argue that the rise of imperialism and monopoly capitalism, although strengthening capital and weakening the power of the working class, also brought onto the historic stage new forms of opposition and resistance, as seen in the national liberation movements against imperialism and colonialism. In particular, as early as 1916, he pointed to Ireland, India, China, and Iran as nations ready to burst out in revolt against Western imperialism. The Third World liberation movements that arose in the 1940s and 1950s, movements that Lenin had anticipated perhaps better than any other theorist of his generation, soon helped to give birth in the 1960s to Black liberation and New Left movements in the United States and other Western industrialised countries. Those 1960s movements in turn helped to bring onto the historic stage still newer social forces, especially the worldwide women's liberation movement. Thus, Lenin had helped to point the way toward the only type of Marxism that is viable today: one with a multiple concept of subjectivity rather than an exclusive reliance on the traditional industrial working class.

This book, first conceptualised when the memory of 1968 was still fresh, is written not for the past but for the future. If Marxist thought is to renew and reassert itself, it will need to grapple critically with the legacy of its greatest figure in the generation after Marx: Lenin. That is what this study attempts to do.

Part 1, comprising four chapters, examines Lenin's writings on Hegel and dialectics from 1914 onward. In the first chapter I discuss the context in which Lenin began to study Hegel: not only the outbreak of World War I and the ensuing first 'crisis of Marxism', but also the theoretical context of his return to Hegel. Therefore I look at the writings on Hegel and dialectics of those whom Lenin considered to be his chief philosophical mentors: Marx, most of all, but also Engels and Georgi Plekhanov. Lenin's pre-1914 writings on Hegel and dialectics are also assessed critically, especially in his book *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* (1908).

Chapters 2 and 3 offer a detailed analysis of Lenin's 'Abstract of Hegel's *Science of Logic*'. Hegel's text is notoriously difficult, and Lenin's notes are sometimes cryptic, but it is not difficult to ascertain the main lines of Lenin's concern with Hegel. In these chapters I examine questions such as the following: How was Lenin reading Hegel? What parts of Hegel's work attracted or repelled him? What changes did his own Marxism undergo, as he read Hegel, with regard to issues such as idealism and materialism, subjectivity, consciousness, negation of the negation, and praxis? To what extent did he change his position from that expressed in *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*? How was his reading similar to or different from those of later Marxists who have commented at length

on Hegel, such as Lukács, Marcuse, and Dunayevskaya, or earlier ones, such as Marx's own reading or those by Engels and Plekhanov? What were some of the limitations of his reading of Hegel?

Chapter 4 examines Lenin's discussions of Hegel and dialectics from 1915 until his death nearly a decade later. Some of these discussions include notes on other works by Hegel, a draft article on dialectics, and various published articles and speeches where he refers to Hegel or dialectics. Lenin made many of these references to dialectics in the course of writing on war, imperialism, and the organisation of the Soviet Union. In his so-called Will, better known for its criticisms of Stalin, he also critiques Nikolai Bukharin for his failure to understand the dialectic. A 1922 article calls for Marxists to become 'materialist friends of the Hegelian dialectic' and for Russian theoretical journals to devote extensive space to publishing and discussing Hegel's work. At the same time I point to an ambivalence in Lenin's post-1915 writings: his public utterances are far more ambiguous and hesitant in criticising traditional Marxism than are his private writings.

Part 2 of this study, 'Lenin on the Dialectics of Revolution, 1914–23', looks at Lenin's social and political theory after 1914. These are among his best-known theoretical writings and, along with the Hegel Notebooks, constitute the main body of his post-1914 Marxism. They had not only a theoretical but also a practical importance, since they were crucial in developing Bolshevik and early Communist doctrine, helping to give direction to the November Revolution and the early Third International.

Chapter 5, which takes up Lenin's well-known *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism*, argues that this work is rooted, at least in part, in his 1914–15 Hegel studies. This Hegelian influence, it is argued, is also part of what distinguishes Lenin's theory of imperialism from those of his contemporaries, Bukharin and Rudolf Hilferding, to which his own work is often compared. Lenin's theory of imperialism is, I argue, dialectical in the sense that he saw the rise of national liberation movements as new historical subjects, as the 'dialectical opposite' to the new stage of imperialism and monopoly capitalism that he mapped out in *Imperialism*. To show what is new in Lenin's writings on national liberation after 1914, I look briefly not only at his earlier work on this topic but also at the writings of Marx and Engels, Luxemburg, Karl Kautsky, and the Austro-Marxists Otto Bauer and Karl Renner. Finally, I critique the limits of Lenin's concept of national liberation.

Chapter 6 begins with Lenin's writings in 1917–18, especially his most important work, *State and Revolution*. The new concept of subjectivity that he developed in 1917–18, with his analysis of the Paris Commune and the Russian soviets as forms of direct democracy, is again viewed as in part an outcome of his Hegel

studies. The limits of Lenin's concept of democracy, both in theory and in practice, are also discussed. I argue that, although Lenin did develop a dialectical theory of imperialism and national liberation and of the state and revolution, he left behind a very ambivalent theoretical legacy. This is in large part because he failed to subject one key facet of his pre-1914 Marxism to a dialectical critique: the concept of the vanguard party. That concept vitiated much of the liberatory content of his post-1914 Marxism.

Part 3, 'Lenin, Hegel, and Western Marxism', returns directly to the issue of dialectics within Marxism. Here the impact specifically of Lenin's Hegel Notebooks is traced and analysed through an examination of the writings of key Western Marxists. Chapter 7 discusses the period from Lenin's death to the early 1950s. I take up the circumstances under which the Hegel Notebooks were first published in 1929–30 in the Soviet Union, where the debate quickly dried up during the period of Stalin's consolidation of power and his attacks on 'idealism'. The notebooks were soon published in German and French, however. I argue that within Central Europe, Lenin's turn to Hegel, known in part through his published writings in German by the early 1920s, helped to create the atmosphere for the path-breaking work of Lukács, Korsch, and Ernst Bloch on Hegelian Marxism. I also assess what these philosophers, who wrote in German, had to say specifically on Lenin's Hegel Notebooks. Special attention is given to Lukács's *Young Hegel* and Bloch's *Subjekt-Objekt*. In addition, the reasons for Korsch's relative lack of interest in the notebooks are examined. The Hegel Notebooks also had an impact in France, where Henri Lefebvre introduced them in the 1930s with a lengthy essay on Hegel and Marx, an essay that prefigured many of the themes of his better-known book, *Dialectical Materialism*. Finally, the writings of Dunayevskaya, C.L.R. James, and Grace Lee in the United States during the 1940s are examined. These theorists, grouped then in the 'Johnson-Forest Tendency', were the first in the United States seriously to discuss Lenin's Hegel Notebooks, using Dunayevskaya's translation. They were also the first group of Western Marxists to make the Hegel Notebooks central to their overall concept of dialectic, viewing them as nearly equal in importance to the writings of Marx on dialectics, including the *1844 Manuscripts*.

Chapter 8 looks not only at the later writings on Lenin and Hegel by Lefebvre in his *La Pensée de Lenine* and Dunayevskaya in her books *Marxism and Freedom* and *Philosophy and Revolution* but also at those of newer figures in France, Italy, and Germany. By the 1950s and 1960s others in France were contributing to the debate from a Hegelian Marxist perspective, as was the Frankfurt sociologist Iring Fetscher in Germany. This chapter also views at some length the counterarguments by Lucio Colletti in Italy and especially by Louis Althusser, the latter in his book *Lenin and Philosophy*. These two philosophers were extremely

hostile to Hegel and attempted to undermine the earlier readings of Lenin's Hegel Notebooks, just as they attacked the even greater interest in the 1950s and 1960s in the work of the young Marx. Finally, I look at Dunayevskaya's last writings, where she raises serious questions about Lenin's reading of Hegel in 1914–15 and makes a sharp critique of his overall Marxism.

This study attempts to open up debate about Lenin's Marxism and Marxist theory generally. Lenin's Hegelianism is still relatively unknown, and still less is generally known about the relationship of his Hegel studies to those of leading Western Marxists. Perhaps today, with the collapse of the Soviet Union, it will be more possible to make a sympathetic and yet critical assessment of Lenin's work, something that I have attempted here. The discussion of Lenin's thought needs to break away from the narrow confines of either Marxist-Leninist canonisation or dismissively hostile Western critiques, something that happened long ago with Marx and even with Lenin's fellow revolutionary leaders who were also theorists, such as Luxemburg or Trotsky. Perhaps this book will also serve as an example of the continuing contemporary relevance of dialectical thought, but even if that is not the case for some readers, I hope that I have shown the importance of dialectical thinking to Lenin, one of the great figures in the history of revolution.

PART 1

Lenin on Hegel and Dialectics



The Crisis of World Marxism in 1914 and Lenin's Plunge into Hegel

The outbreak of World War I in 1914 shattered European liberals' belief in peaceful and evolutionary progress. To Marxists, however, most of whom *already* believed that capitalism was a violent and warlike system, an equally great shock occurred when, yielding to the pressure of domestic patriotic sentiment, most of the world's socialist parties, including the largest and most important one, the German Social Democracy, came out in support of the war policies of their respective governments. This meant that French and German socialists, who at the 1907 and 1912 congresses of the Second International had voted overwhelmingly to oppose any 'imperialist' war carried out by their 'bourgeois' governments, now suddenly faced each other not as comrades but as combatants, each claiming that its government was only defending itself from aggression. So great was the shock to Lenin that when he saw a German newspaper report on the German Social Democracy's vote to support the war, he initially thought that it was a forgery by the Prussian military for propaganda purposes. He soon took account of the new situation, however, first changing his place of exile from Austrian-ruled Poland to neutral Switzerland. Lenin was part of a small band of left-wing socialist leaders that from the outset opposed the war and that branded the more established leaders as betrayers of the socialist ideal. Its ranks included two prominent leaders of the German Social Democracy as well, Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht.

Once he arrived in Bern, Lenin moved quickly in two seemingly contradictory directions: (1) he spent long weeks in the library engaged in daily study of Hegel's writings, especially the *Science of Logic*, writing hundreds of pages of notes on Hegel, and (2) as is much better known, he moved toward revolutionary defeatism as being the policy that Marxists should have adopted toward the governments of the various belligerent countries and called for the establishment of a new international. During these months of studying Hegel, he broke with the concept of Marxism as a scientific materialism that characterised the Second International. This also included a break with his own earlier views.

Although both supporters and critics of Lenin during the Russian Revolution attest to his political suppleness and acuity, few if any commentators see this as a theoretical question. They simply ascribe it to good political judgment, as if this were a biographical fact having little or nothing to do with Lenin's concept

of dialectic. Many older studies of Russian Marxism have stressed that Lenin was above all a political and organisational leader and that theoretical considerations were at most secondary in his life and work.¹ Others have argued that Lenin was a serious theorist but that economic and social theory was at the centre of his concept of Marxism.² Still others have given some weight to his writings on dialectics, especially the Hegel Notebooks (also known as the *Philosophical Notebooks*),³ but have not seen them as decisive to his post-1914 theory and political activity.⁴

As valuable as each of these types of studies has been, they tend to minimise or even ignore an important aspect of Lenin's theorising. The Hegel Notebooks are important in at least three major ways. (1) They are a key to understanding the context of his theorising after 1914. I will argue that Lenin's critical appropriation of Hegelian dialectics in 1914–15 formed an important part of his theorising after 1914, not only altering his general concept of dialectic, but also becoming part of the ground of his better-known writings on imperialism, national liberation, and the state and revolution. (2) The Hegel Notebooks are also important in themselves as an interesting text on Hegelian dialectics, a

1 An important example of a work that treats all Lenin's theoretical work as being primarily political or organisational in an immediate sense is Schapiro 1960. For a more recent example of this type of focus, albeit from a very different ideological standpoint, see especially Cliff 1975–9. Raya Dunayevskaya, one of the foremost commentators on Lenin's relation to Hegel, has written an incisive critique of Cliff's work. See Dunayevskaya 1978b. For a more recent treatment from a perspective essentially similar to Cliff's, see Le Blanc 1990.

2 See especially Harding 1978, 1981. An earlier study of Lenin's political thought, by the American sovietologist Alfred G. Meyer (Meyer 1957), makes only a brief mention of the Hegel Notebooks because, according to the author, their effect 'on policy in the Leninist movement and the Soviet state has been of no more than marginal importance' (p. 21).

3 I will refer to the work as the Hegel Notebooks rather than use the Moscow editors' more general term, *Philosophical Notebooks*, to refer to Lenin's 1914–15 writings on Hegel, the former being closer to that used for the first French publication of this work, edited and introduced by the leading Marxist theorist Henri Lefebvre and Norbert Guterman. See Lenine 1938. I will occasionally also cite the 'Abstract of Hegel's *Science of Logic*' in referring specifically to those particular notes and will reserve use of the name *Philosophical Notebooks* to refer to the Moscow-based editions that unfortunately include many early and extraneous pieces that have little or nothing to do either with Hegel or with Lenin's thinking during and after 1914. The overall effect of this great mass of material is to submerge what is really important and new, the Hegel studies. In this sense, the sheer bulk of what has been published by Lenin, the endless abstract praise of his 'genius', and so forth, actually serves to obscure what is original in his theorising. These points are discussed in more detail in Chapter 7, where I take up the circumstances surrounding the publication of Lenin's Hegel Notebooks.

4 See Service 1991 and Liebman 1973. Each of these works briefly discusses Lenin's Hegel Notebooks of 1914–15.

hotly debated issue in radical and Marxist theory in recent years. (3) Finally, the notebooks form an important but usually neglected link between classical Marxism and neo-Marxism. Several years before Georg Lukács, Karl Korsch, and Antonio Gramsci began their major works, Lenin had begun to lay the ground for what is often termed Hegelian Marxism.

To this day Lenin's plunge into Hegel remains one of the least-known aspects of his Marxism, despite nearly six decades of discussion of this issue from widely differing standpoints by Western Marxists such as Lukács, Korsch, Ernst Bloch, Henri Lefebvre, Raya Dunayevskaya, C.L.R. James, Louis Althusser, Iring Fetscher, and Lucio Colletti, among others.⁵ Lenin's Hegel Notebooks have been available in published form in Russian since 1929, in German since 1932, in French since 1938, and in English and Italian since 1958, yet they remain relatively obscure. This obscurity resulted in part from the fact that official Soviet Marxists and their colleagues outside the Soviet Union downplayed the notebooks. That is not the whole story, however, since the same could be said for the work of the young Marx, yet despite (or because of) Soviet attempts to downplay them, Marx's early writings have become a major topic of discussion in the West since the 1940s. One possible explanation is that our common image of Lenin tends to be that of an activist and an organisational leader, the inventor of the concept of the vanguard party and the leader of the 1917 revolution. How could something as abstract as Hegel studies have been decisive for such a person? Our common image of Marx is quite different: an exile intellectual burying himself in the British Museum as he wrote his masterwork, *Capital*. Both images are very one-sided, however. Marx devoted much of his life to political activity, playing a major role, for example, in the founding of the First International in 1864, during the same period that he was completing Volume 1 of *Capital*, first published in 1867.⁶ Lenin, however, devoted himself to Hegel studies in the midst of the most important political and organisational crisis of his life and continued his intensive theoretical studies of imperialism, national liberation, and the state and revolution right up through the Bolshevik Revolution of November 1917.

Another possible reason for the obscurity of Lenin's Hegel Notebooks is that they fall outside many of the traditional distinctions that have been made between Western Marxism, which is more concerned with subjectivity, dialectics, and culture, and official Soviet Marxism, which was concerned more

5 The curious and sometimes tortuous history of the discussion of Lenin's Hegel Notebooks in Marxist theory since their publication will be taken up in Chapters 7 and 8.

6 On this point see, for example, Rubel and Manale 1976.

narrowly with scientific economism.⁷ To be sure, major distinctions exist between Western Marxism and official Soviet Marxist-Leninism, but this study will go beyond that simplistic distinction to focus on a work by Lenin that takes up some of the themes later associated with Western Marxism. I will argue that Lenin's Hegel Notebooks and many of his other post-1914 writings stand closer to both the writings of the young Marx and those of Western Marxism than to official Marxist-Leninist positions.

1 The Significance of the Turn to Hegel

Lenin was the first Marxist leader or theorist since Marx to undertake the type of serious Hegel studies exemplified in the work he did on Hegel's *Science of Logic* from September to December 1914, studies that he expanded in 1915 to include other works of Hegel. Even though younger Marxist intellectuals such as Lukács and those of the Frankfurt School delved into the same areas from the 1920s on, they for the most part tended to keep their dialectical philosophy and sociology far removed from practical politics, especially the type of dialectical analysis of politics and economics that Lenin was to carry out in his studies of imperialism, national self-determination, and the state and revolution.

Certainly none of the major Marxist thinkers of the twentieth century who were also leaders of parties – not Leon Trotsky, Luxemburg, Karl Kautsky, or Mao Zedong – with the sole exception of Gramsci (and even then those writings were locked away in prison or in party archives for many years afterward), had made that 'return' to the Hegelian dialectic that Marx had called the 'source of all dialectics'.⁸ Nor did any of the younger layer of Bolshevik theoreticians, such as Bukharin or Yevgeny Preobrazhensky, make such a move.

The fact that Lenin refers only occasionally in direct terms to the Hegelian dialectic in his published writings and speeches after 1914 did not make those references any less jarring to a world of Marxist debate that had long before gotten into the well-worn groove of giving emphasis only to the first part of the term 'materialist dialectics'. Nonetheless, one can see Lenin's public references to Hegel and dialectics here and there in the heat of controversy. I will

7 This distinction between Western and Soviet Marxism was developed by Korsch in the 1920s and popularised further by Maurice Merleau-Ponty in the 1950s. See especially the essay 'Western Marxism', in Merleau-Ponty 1973 [orig. French edition 1955], pp. 30–58. For more discussion of this issue, see Chapter 8.

8 Marx 1976a, p. 744. Marx makes this statement in a critique of John Stuart Mill, whose thinking was, he claims, limited by a failure to understand Hegelian dialectics.

view these more fully later, but I offer just one key example here: in the middle of the important 1920–1 ‘Trade Union Debate’, in which Lenin differed with fellow Bolsheviks Trotsky, Nikolai Bukharin, and Alexander Shlyapnikov over the role of trade unions in the new Soviet social order, he suddenly declares: ‘dialectical logic requires that an object be taken in development, in change, in “self-movement” (as Hegel sometimes puts it)’.⁹ Although such remarks are relatively rare in Lenin’s published writings and speeches, they are merely the tip of the iceberg, for the posthumous 1929–30 publication of his 1914–15 notes on Hegel showed his Hegel studies to have been quite extensive. I will argue later not only that Hegelian dialectics played a central role in Lenin’s notes on philosophy for private use but also that these notes had an important relationship to his major post-1914 writings, beginning with his 1915–16 writings on imperialism and national liberation.

The significance of Lenin’s Hegel studies has been hotly debated for many years. On the one hand, in the words of Raya Dunayevskaya, the Hegelian Marxist who first translated Lenin’s Hegel Notebooks into English: ‘He began reading Hegel’s *Science of Logic*. It formed the philosophic foundation for the great divide in Marxism. His *Philosophic Notebooks* show how completely he reorganised his conception of the relationship between the materialistic or economic forces, and the human, subjective forces, the relationship between science and human activity’.¹⁰ On the other hand, the French structuralist Marxist Louis Althusser, although not attempting to minimise Lenin’s interest in Hegel, nonetheless reaches the conclusion that Lenin learned virtually nothing from Hegel. Althusser writes that despite hundreds of pages of notes and months of study in 1914–15, ‘basically Lenin did not need to read Hegel in order to understand him, because he had already understood Hegel, having closely read and understood Marx’.¹¹ This point of view, however, tinged as it sometimes is with an almost violent anti-Hegelianism, does not shed much light on why Lenin did turn to an intensive study of Hegel in 1914. My own view, the reader will see, tends to follow that of Dunayevskaya.

9 cw 32:94. This passage was singled out as a fine example of a dialectical analysis by the Critical Theorist Herbert Marcuse (Marcuse 1941). For more discussion on this point, see Chapter 7.

10 Dunayevskaya 1988 [1958], p. 168.

11 Althusser 1971, p. 112.

2 Marxism and Hegel before 1914

To grasp both the context and the novelty of Lenin's Hegel studies, it is important to look at how the relationship between Marxism and Hegel had developed before that time. In the following discussion I will touch very briefly on four sets of writings: Marx's critique of Hegel, especially in the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, which were not published until the late 1920s and thus unknown to Lenin; Engels's development of a scientific critique of Hegel; Georgi Plekhanov's further development of Engels's conceptions for Russian Marxism; and Lenin's pre-1914 writings on the Hegel-Marx relationship, which were influenced to a great extent by the writings of Engels and Plekhanov.

2.1 Marx's 'Critique of the Hegelian Dialectic' (1844)

Marx's 'Critique of the Hegelian Dialectic', which forms the concluding essay in the 1844 *Manuscripts*, is his most detailed critique of Hegel's concept of dialectic and, as Dunayevskaya has argued, the place where 'we find that we have been made witness to the origination of the *Marxian dialectic*, historical materialism'.¹² The year before, Marx had sharply critiqued Hegel's political philosophy, writing lengthy notes and an article on the *Philosophy of Right*,¹³ but in 1844 he returned to Hegel's work, especially the *Phenomenology of Mind* (1807).¹⁴ During this period Marx was beginning also to criticise Ludwig Feuerbach, whose writings had exerted a great influence on the Left Hegelians in Germany in the 1840s. Marx assesses Feuerbach at the beginning of his 1844 essay on Hegel, where he distinguishes him from many of the Young Hegelians by writing that 'Feuerbach is the only one who has a *serious, critical* relation to the Hegelian dialectic' and that he 'laid the foundation of genuine materialism and real science'.¹⁵

12 Dunayevskaya 1989 [1973], p. 59.

13 Marx 1972a [1843].

14 Hegel's term *Geist* has been translated as either 'mind' or 'spirit', and sometimes even as 'culture'. In keeping with the context in which this term has been taken up in the Marxist tradition, here and elsewhere I have usually rendered *Geist* as 'mind', and *geistig* as 'mental'. For a probing discussion of the limitations of either 'mind' or 'spirit' as translations of *Geist*, see Williams 1992, pp. 1–6.

15 Marx, 'Critique of the Hegelian Dialectic', trans. Dunayevskaya in her *Marxism and Freedom* (Marx 1958a [1844]), p. 304. I am using with some minor alterations Dunayevskaya's translation, the first English translation of this essay, because I believe that it is still the best in capturing Marx's dialectical language. The translation appeared in the original 1958 edition but not in subsequent editions of Dunayevskaya's book.

This is where Marx *begins* his critique, however, not where he ends it. Unfortunately, many commentators in the English-speaking world have missed Marx's sharp critique of Feuerbach and return to Hegel in 1844. In one otherwise very good edition of the writings of the young Marx published in the 1960s, the editors go so far as to place the 1844 *Manuscripts* under the heading 'Feuerbachian Criticism of Hegel'.¹⁶ To be sure, Feuerbach's anthropological standpoint, his critique of religion, and his attempted inversion of Hegel's idealistic standpoint each were taken up to some degree by the young Marx. Especially important here was Feuerbach's notion that 'Hegel thinks all objects only as predicates of thought which thinks itself';¹⁷ a critique of the sometimes abstract character of Hegelian idealism. Nonetheless, as one very careful non-Marxist scholar, Nicholas Lobkowitz, showed nearly three decades ago, Feuerbach's 'influence would seem to be far less than is generally believed':

The overestimation of Marx's dependence on Feuerbach is due, on the one hand, to the fact that for many decades the *Holy Family* was the only known writing by the 'early Marx', and, on the other hand, to Engels' statement of 1895 that after the publication of the *Essence of Christianity* (1841) they all were 'for the present, Feuerbachians'. Since the publication of Marx's literary remains¹⁸ in the 1930s it has become increasingly more obvious that Marx's enthusiasm for Feuerbach, if one can speak of enthusiasm at all, was comparatively short-lived and that from the very beginning it was not without critical overtones.¹⁹

Let us now look at how, as Herbert Marcuse argues in an early analysis of the 'Critique of the Hegelian Dialectic', Marx in this essay 'reaches back beyond Feuerbach to Hegel'.²⁰

Marx returns to Hegel by embracing one of Hegel's key concepts, the negation of the negation, despite Feuerbach's dismissal of this concept as essen-

16 See Easton and Guddat (eds.) 1967.

17 Cited by Lobkowitz 1967, p. 252.

18 Apparently Lobkowitz is referring to the 1844 *Manuscripts*.

19 Lobkowitz 1967, p. 251.

20 Marcuse, 'The Foundations of Historical Materialism' (orig. German edition 1932), in Marcuse 1973, p. 21. For a contrary view stressing that Marx's position in 1844 was still to a great extent Feuerbachian and that he moved back toward Kant in this essay, see Jürgen Habermas 1971, who argues: "With regard to the epistemological justification of the natural sciences Marx stands with Kant against Hegel" (pp. 44–45). For an incisive critique of Habermas's reading of Marx, see Rockmore 1989.

tially theological. To Marx, the ‘thoroughly negative and critical character’²¹ of Hegel’s philosophy is what makes it historical and revolutionary: ‘But inasmuch as Hegel comprehends the negation of the negation in accordance with a positive relation, which is immanent in it ... to that extent he has discovered, though only as an *abstract, logical and speculative* expression, the movement of history’.²² This is because Hegel has caught, albeit in abstract form, the concept of alienation. This, according to Marx, means that Hegel ‘grasps the essence of labor’²³ as a creative activity because, especially in his *Phenomenology*, he develops a ‘dialectic of negativity as the moving and creating principle’²⁴ of human society and history. Feuerbach, Marx complains, misses the revolutionary and critical character of Hegel’s concept of negativity: ‘Feuerbach regards the negation of the negation only as the contradiction of philosophy with itself, as philosophy which affirms Theology’.²⁵ To Marx, however, Hegel’s concept of negativity is a powerful source for a revolutionary critique of capitalist society.

At the same time, Marx critiques the abstract and dehumanised character of Hegel’s idealistic standpoint, writing that for Hegel ‘only the mind is the true essence of human beings [*Menschen*]’.²⁶ This is so because Hegel holds to the abstract philosopher’s stance that alienation can be overcome at the level of thought. Much of Marx’s critique focuses on the chapter entitled ‘Absolute Knowledge’, with which Hegel concludes the *Phenomenology*, and Marx announces that he will ‘present in a detailed fashion the one-sidedness and the limitation of Hegel’ by taking up this chapter.²⁷ To Marx, one of Hegel’s key errors is that he ‘regards human essence, the human being, as equal to *self-consciousness*’ and that therefore all forms of alienation are to Hegel ‘no more than alienation of self-consciousness’.²⁸

21 Marx 1958a [1844], p. 308.

22 Marx 1958a [1844], p. 305.

23 Marx 1958a [1844], p. 309.

24 Ibid.

25 Marx 1958a [1844], p. 305.

26 Marx 1958a [1844]. I have altered Dunayevskaya’s 1958 translation here and elsewhere, rendering the German word *Mensch* as “human being” rather than as “Man,” in consultation with the German original. See Marx and Engels, *Werke: Ergänzungsband*, part 1 (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1968), p. 573. All the existing English translations of the 1844 *Manuscripts* of which I am aware translate *Mensch* here and elsewhere as “man,” making Marx sound sexist in English in a way that he does not in the German original.

27 Marx 1958a [1844], p. 310.

28 Marx 1958a [1844], p. 311.

Contrasting it to (but also drawing on) Hegel's concern with consciousness and other mental capacities, Marx develops his own humanist dialectic, putting 'the actual, corporeal human being, standing on firm and well rounded earth, inhaling and exhaling all natural forces',²⁹ at the centre of his concept of dialectic. Despite this seeming dismissal of Hegel's idealism, however, Marx writes a bit further in the same paragraph of the positive features of this same idealism. Marx here stresses the unity of idealism and materialism rather than the positivist scientific materialism found in the writings of so many of his followers. He writes of 'a thorough-going Naturalism or Humanism' that 'distinguishes itself both from idealism and materialism, and is, at the same time, the truth uniting both'.³⁰ Such a notion of the unity of idealism and materialism contrasts sharply with the scientific materialism of orthodox Marxism.

Another problem, Marx remarks, is Hegel's tendency to hold back from drawing the really radical conclusions flowing from his concept of negativity: 'In Hegel, the negation of the negation is, therefore, not the confirmation of true essence, namely, through negation of apparent essence [*Scheinwesens*], but the confirmation of apparent essence, or of alienated essence'.³¹ Hegel arrives at this position because he stops short of posing concretely the positive overcoming of alienation. Marx here also criticises sharply the element of reconciliation in one of Hegel's core concepts, that of sublation [*Aufhebung*]:³² 'Therefore sublating plays a peculiar role, in which both negation and preservation or affirmation are united'.³³ In this critique of Hegel's use of the concept of subla-

29 Marx 1958a [1844], p. 313.

30 Ibid.

31 Marx 1958a [1844], p. 317.

32 Hegel's term *Aufhebung* is notoriously difficult to translate, and it has been rendered into English variously as, among others, 'supersession', 'abolition', 'transcendence', or 'preservation'. In keeping with the standard usage in recent Hegel scholarship I have instead used the old English term 'sublation', which combines at least some of these meanings. I have therefore updated Dunayevskaya's translation here and will render *Aufhebung* as 'sublation' throughout this book. Hegel himself gives the following explanation of *Aufhebung*'s 'double meaning': 'On the one hand, we understand it to mean "clear away" or "cancel", and in that sense we say that a law or regulation is cancelled [*aufgehoben*]. But the word also means "to preserve", and we say in this sense that something is well taken care of [*wohl aufgehoben*]. This ambiguity in linguistic usage, through which the same word has a negative and a positive meaning, cannot be regarded as an accident nor yet as a reason to reproach language as if it were a source of confusion. We ought rather to recognise here the speculative spirit of our language, which transcends the "either/or" of mere understanding' (EL ¶96).

33 Marx 1958a [1844], pp. 317–18.

tion, Marx is objecting also to Hegel's conservative political conclusions in the *Philosophy of Right*.

Despite this apparent dismissal of Hegel's concept of sublation, Marx returns to it when a few paragraphs later he discusses what he terms 'the positive moments of the Hegelian dialectic'.³⁴ These positive moments include 'sublating as an objective movement',³⁵ which leads Marx in turn to the articulation of his own concept, not found in Hegel, of a 'positive Humanism, beginning from itself'.³⁶ This does not mean, however, that Hegel totally misses such a concept, for a bit further on, Marx writes that 'insofar as he grasps the meaning of the *positive* sense of the negation related to itself', Hegel does show a grasp of the material, corporeal world because 'he considers labor to be the self-productive act of human beings'.³⁷ Then Marx returns directly to a discussion of Hegel's absolutes, this time the absolute idea in the *Science of Logic*. The absolute idea, he writes, 'is nothing else than mere abstraction',³⁸ in large part because Hegel in the end 'separates thinking from the subject'.³⁹ Like the rest of the pieces in Marx's 1844 *Manuscripts*, this essay on Hegel is unfinished, and it breaks off just as he begins to discuss absolute mind in Hegel's *Philosophy of Mind*. Therefore we cannot know what conclusion Marx would have made on Hegel's absolutes.

Throughout this remarkable essay Marx goes back and forth between an appreciation of the revolutionary character of Hegel's dialectic and a critique of Hegel's dehumanised form of idealism. Nowhere in this critique does Marx propose anything resembling the scientific materialism of orthodox Marxism. In fact, in an explicit critique of the standpoint of natural science, Marx writes elsewhere in the 1844 *Manuscripts* that although the 'natural sciences have developed an enormous activity and have appropriated for themselves a constantly expanding subject matter', they have also developed in an alienated form, separated from life: 'To have one basis for life and another for science is *a priori* a lie'.⁴⁰

Although Marx refined and developed his thought in the following forty years, the concept of dialectic worked out in 1844 remained the foundation of his mature work. This can be seen in the radical humanism of the *Grundrisse* or in his use of Hegel's concept of the negation of the negation in the concluding

34 Marx 1958a [1844], p. 319.

35 Marx 1958a [1844], p. 319.

36 Marx 1958a [1844], p. 320.

37 Ibid.

38 Marx 1958a [1844], p. 322.

39 Marx 1958a [1844], p. 323.

40 Marx 1958b [1844], p. 300.

chapter of *Capital*, where Marx uses Hegel's concept to discuss what he views as the impending social revolution, wherein 'the expropriators are expropriated'. Earlier, he writes, the rise of capitalism resulted in the expropriation of the peasantry from their land, turning them into proletarians. This was the first negation, which would lead in its turn to its own negation. Using Hegelian language, Marx writes that if this were to occur, the expropriation of the capitalists by the working people would constitute the 'negation of the negation'.⁴¹

As noted earlier, in *Capital* Marx terms the Hegelian dialectic the 'source of all dialectics'. He also expresses some key differences with Hegel in an afterword to the 1872 second German edition of *Capital*, where he writes that his book is grounded in 'the dialectical method' and that

my dialectical method is, in its foundations, not only different from the Hegelian, but exactly opposite to it ... I criticised the mystificatory side of the Hegelian dialectic nearly thirty years ago, at a time when it was still the fashion. But just when I was working at the first volume of *Capital*, the ill-humored, arrogant and mediocre epigones who now talk large in educated German circles began to take pleasure in treating Hegel ... as a 'dead dog'. I therefore openly avowed myself the pupil of that mighty thinker, and even here and there in the chapter on the theory of value, coquetted with the mode of expression peculiar to him.

Marx writes further that Hegel's dialectic 'must be inverted, in order to discover the rational kernel within the mystical shell'. If that is done, the dialectic becomes 'in its very essence critical and revolutionary'.⁴²

As we have seen, Marx tended to dismiss Hegel's absolutes in the 1844 *Manuscripts*, but that work was left unfinished, as was his discussion of those absolutes. In his mature work he develops his own concept of the absolute, referring for example in the *Grundrisse* to the historical development of human capacities and needs as 'the absolute movement of becoming'.⁴³ In *Capital*, when he conceptualises the tendency of capitalist society to divide into, on the one hand, those who control the ever-increasing social wealth and, on the other, the working class and the unemployed 'reserve army of labour', whose

41 Marx 1976a, p. 929. For a contrary view that complains of Marx's resort to Hegelian language in this passage of *Capital*, see Althusser 1971. Althusser writes that this use of Hegelian terminology was 'imprudent' and 'that Stalin was right, for once, to suppress "the negation of the negation" from the laws of the dialectic' (p. 95).

42 Marx 1976a, pp. 102–3.

43 Marx 1973, p. 488.

constituents experience 'misery' and 'torture', he calls this process 'the absolute general law of capitalist accumulation'.⁴⁴ Dunayevskaya has assessed Marx's concept of the absolute as follows:

It is true, of course, that Marx had to break with Hegel's Absolutes before he could discover the materialist conception of history. But this hardly explains Marx's return to Hegel ... where Hegel's Absolutes are always 'syntheses', unities – of history and philosophy, of theory and practice, of subject and object – Marx's are always total *diremptions* – absolute irreconcilable contradictions, whether that be of technical base and social character, or of accumulation of capital at one pole and misery and unemployment at the other, or of dead labor versus living labor. Where Hegel's Absolutes are always high points, Marx's are always collapses ... And where Hegel's Absolutes seem achievable within the existing framework, *Marx's tear up the existing society by its roots*.⁴⁵

This suggests that although Marx's absolutes may have been rooted in Hegel, that rootedness came through a real process of *Aufhebung*, or sublation, one where, at least on the surface, there is less identity than difference with Hegel.

Unfortunately, the writings of the young Marx lay for the most part unpublished and unread by the Second International, which rendered the context of the preceding notions obscure. Not only was this true with regard to Marx's reference in *Capital* to writings 'nearly thirty years ago', very likely his 'Critique of the Hegelian Dialectic', where his position on Hegel is elaborated most fully, but it also meant that the background to Marx's briefer references to the absolute in *Capital* was missed. In this failure to publish or even study in the archives Marx's early writings, the Second International followed Engels, who had not encouraged their publication.⁴⁶ Even when some fragments of the young Marx's work were published around the turn of the century, the leading Second International theorists did not seriously rethink their own scientific materialist concept of dialectics. By 1901, in reviewing a collection of Marx's youthful writings, even an original and creative theorist such as Luxemburg wrote dismissively of the 'painful inadequacy of his idealistic world conception'. In a curious procedure, one that has been followed by many 'orthodox' Marxists ever since, she imposed her own scientific materialist conception of 'Marxism' on Marx's early work, found that Marx does not agree with it, and

44 Marx 1976a, p. 798.

45 Dunayevskaya 1989 [1973], pp. 92–3.

46 For a discussion of this point, see Dunayevskaya 1991 [1982], p. 131.

therefore pronounced the young Marx 'idealist' and pre-Marxist. Luxemburg also stressed, following Engels, that it was only Hegel's method, not his system, that was relevant to the development of Marx's mature theory.⁴⁷ After the Russian Revolution a full edition of Marx's works finally began to appear, only to be stopped short by Stalin, who had its editor, David Riazanov, executed.

2.2 *Engels's Ludwig Feuerbach (1886)*

Engels, whose views on philosophical issues tended to dominate the Second International, especially since Marx's most philosophical writings had not been published, was far more enamoured of natural science than was Marx and tended to view many issues in a manner similar to positivism. He did not reject Hegel; instead, as the German Marx scholar Iring Fetscher writes, 'in the case of Friedrich Engels the two concepts of science (namely, the Hegelian and the positivist) are still amalgamated in a rather confused manner of which the author himself is not properly aware'.⁴⁸ This problem can be seen fairly easily in Engels's influential essay on dialectics, *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy*, first published in 1886, three years after Marx's death. My concern here is not so much Engels's discussion of Feuerbach but rather the occasion that this essay gave him to sketch out what he evidently considered to be a general view of the problem of dialectics for Marxism. Engels was certainly familiar with the whole of Hegel's work, having been, along with Marx, a Young Hegelian in Germany in the 1840s. Nonetheless, he does not discuss the *Phenomenology*, the *Science of Logic*, or any of Hegel's other major philosophical works in any detail but instead concentrates more on Hegel's political philosophy. He argues that despite its apparent conservatism, Hegel's concept of historical necessity means not only that the real is rational but also that, over time, 'all that exists deserves to perish'.⁴⁹

It is in this essay that Engels makes his famous distinction between method and system in Hegel's philosophy. In a discussion of differences between Left and Right Hegelians in 1840s Germany, he writes: 'Whoever placed the emphasis on the Hegelian *system* could be fairly conservative in both spheres [religion and politics]; whoever regarded the dialectical *method* as the main thing could belong to the most extreme opposition, both in religion and politics'.⁵⁰

47 Luxemburg 1970 [1901], p. 137.

48 Fetscher 1971, pp. 62–63. The most detailed recent treatment of Engels's life and work is found in Carver 1990.

49 Engels 1990 [1886], p. 359.

50 Engels 1990 [1886], p. 363.

This schematic elaboration, vulgarised further by later theorists, became an excuse for post-Marx Marxists to avoid grappling directly with Hegel's work. An especially pernicious part of Hegel's system, writes Engels, is 'the absolute idea', which, he maintains, includes a notion of 'the end of history'.⁵¹ Here, he claims, 'the whole dogmatic content of the Hegelian system is declared to be absolute truth, in contradiction to his dialectical method, which dissolves all that is dogmatic'.⁵²

Although Engels takes Hegel seriously, the preceding statement could be (and was) read to imply that Marxists need not study Hegel directly, especially when combined with the following passage: 'With Hegel philosophy comes to an end altogether; on the one hand, because in his system he sums up its whole development in the most splendid fashion; and on the other hand, because, even if unconsciously, he shows us the way out of the labyrinth of systems to real positive cognition of the world'.⁵³ Thus, to Engels, philosophy ends with Hegel, and the task of the future is positive and scientific knowledge, albeit with occasional reference to the word *dialectics*. Because philosophy has come to an end, dialectics is something merely to be applied, not delved into and developed anew for each generation of Marxists. The future lies in scientific materialism.

Far from seriously critiquing Feuerbach, as had Marx in 1844, for having dismissed key dialectical categories such as the negation of the negation,⁵⁴ Engels praises Feuerbach for placing 'materialism on the throne again'.⁵⁵ In fact, writes Engels, even Feuerbach is ultimately wrong because his philosophy also ends in idealism. This leads Engels to his second schematisation, one that was to haunt post-Marx Marxism even more than the dichotomy of system and method. He writes that the 'question of the relation of thinking to being' was historically the central one for philosophers and that 'the answers which the philosophers gave to this question split them into two great camps. Those who asserted the primacy of the mind over nature and, therefore, in the last instance, assumed world creation in some form or other ... comprised the camp of idealism. The others, who regarded nature as primary, belong to the various schools of

51 Engels 1990 [1886], p. 360.

52 Engels 1990 [1886], p. 361.

53 Engels 1990 [1886], p. 362.

54 It is true that Engels does defend the category 'negation of the negation' in his *Anti-Dühring* (1878), but that is not part of his 1886 critique of Feuerbach. The defence occurs in a different context, that of defending Marx against accusations of Hegelian idealism for having referred to the negation of the negation in *Capital*.

55 Engels 1990 [1886], p. 364.

materialism'.⁵⁶ Thus, to be a Marxist in philosophy, the main thing is to choose materialism over idealism. Further, Hegel's idealistic dialectic can be 'inverted', since 'ultimately, the Hegelian system represents merely a materialism idealistically turned upside down'.⁵⁷ Hegel's dialectic, which stands on its head, can be 'placed upon its feet',⁵⁸ on firm materialist ground. Here Engels is taking a single statement in Marx's 1873 afterword to *Capital* and making it into a universal. In his own critique of Hegel, whether in 1844 or 1873, Marx is far subtler and expresses more openly his great intellectual debt to Hegel than does Engels.

Even though Engels criticises mechanical materialism, it is still presumably on the correct side, opposed to 'the camp of idealism'. To become dialectical, mechanical materialism mainly has to begin to 'comprehend the world as a process'.⁵⁹ Engels suggests that mechanical materialism can become dialectical by internalising not Hegelian dialectics but rather the latest discoveries of the natural sciences, such as cell biology, physics, and chemistry, each of which show matter as a process rather than as a merely static entity.

Such is the overall conclusion of Engels's essay, even though when it was published, he appended to it Marx's 'Theses on Feuerbach' (1845), the first thesis of which states: 'The chief defect of all previous materialism – that of Feuerbach included – is that things [*Gegenstand*], reality, sensuousness, are conceived only in the form of the *object* or of *contemplation*, but not as *sensuous human activity, practice*, not subjectively. Hence, in contradistinction to materialism, the *active* side was set forth abstractly by idealism – which of course does not know real, sensuous activity as such'.⁶⁰ Far from choosing between 'two camps', idealism and materialism, Marx here once again seems to see some type of interrelationship of materialism and idealism, with the latter helping to develop subjectivity and the active side of the dialectic. When this material is read in isolation from his then unpublished 1844 *Manuscripts*, however, and as a mere appendix to Engels's *Ludwig Feuerbach*, the key differences between Marx and Engels on dialectics and on the relationship between idealism and materialism tend to be obscured. That was true for the whole generation of Marxists who came after Engels, including Lenin.

What tended to be remembered from Marx's 'Theses on Feuerbach' was not the preceding critique of materialism but the eleventh thesis, as edited by Engels, which states: 'The philosophers have only *interpreted* the world in

56 Engels 1990 [1886], p. 366.

57 Engels 1990 [1886], p. 368.

58 Engels 1990 [1886], p. 383.

59 Engels 1990 [1886], p. 370.

60 Marx 1976b, p. 3.

various ways; the point, however, is to change it'. In an unpardonable editorial decision, Engels took it on himself to add the word 'however' [*aber*] in the second clause, which, even if unintentionally, gives the whole thesis a more activist, antiphilosophical tone. Marx's point is severely distorted, but the edited version does seem to buttress Engels's own view of the 'end of philosophy'. Marx's original version was not published until 1924.⁶¹ Engels was more correct than he or his followers knew when he wrote in a footnote to *Ludwig Feuerbach*: 'Marx was a genius; we others were at best talented'.⁶²

2.3 *Plekhanov's 1891 Essay on Hegel*

In general, Georgi Plekhanov, for many years the most important Russian Marxist theoretician, takes over Engels's views on Hegel, but he sets a somewhat different tone for the debate, for he does stress the importance of studying Hegel directly and considers Hegel a major precursor of Marx. The French Hegel scholar Guy Planty-Bonjour goes so far as to argue that Plekhanov 'rehabilitated' Hegel from the scorn that had been heaped on his work by both Russian populists and Social Democrats.⁶³ Whereas Engels emphasises positivism and natural science, Plekhanov gives greater stress to the historical and evolutionary elements within Hegel's own philosophy. He really tries to 'read' Hegel materialistically, seemingly following Engels's advice to stand Hegel on his feet, but he does so without taking up, as Lenin was later to complain in his Hegel Notebooks, major works on the dialectic proper, such as the *Science of Logic*. Unlike some of the other leading theorists of the Second International, such as Kautsky, Eduard Bernstein, and the Austro-Marxists, however, Plek-

61 For the two versions of the theses but without any explanatory notes indicating what Engels changed, see the official Moscow-based edition, Marx and Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 5, pp. 3–9. For a critique of Engels's editing of Marx's eleventh thesis, see Maximilien Rubel's more independent edition, Marx 1982, pp. 1029–33. In his notes accompanying the eleventh thesis, Rubel writes: 'Engels added to this last thesis the sense of an opposition' between philosophy and action 'which it does not imply at all' (p. 1717).

62 Engels 1990 [1986], p. 382. In my discussion here and elsewhere of Engels, where I have critiqued his concept of dialectic, I do not mean to imply that his work as a whole should be dismissed. Many of Engels's own writings on other issues such as *The Peasant War in Germany* and *The Condition of the Working Class in England* are serious contributions to Marxist theory. His even more important work in editing Marx's notes to produce Volumes 2 and 3 of *Capital* was indispensable in making Marx's chief work available to the public.

63 Planty-Bonjour 1974, p. 259. Although it contains the best discussion I have found of Plekhanov's relation to Hegel, this work tends to minimise the differences between Plekhanov's and Lenin's appropriations of Hegel. For a critique of Planty-Bonjour's position, see Chapter 8.

hanov vigorously opposes neo-Kantianism, holding Hegel in far higher esteem than he does Kant.⁶⁴

These elements can be seen in one of Plekhanov's major statements on Hegel – in fact, the only essay directly on Hegel by a major Marxist theorist during the whole period from Marx's death to 1914. Entitled 'For the Sixtieth Anniversary of Hegel's Death' and published in 1891, it appeared in the foremost Marxist theoretical journal of the period, the German Social Democracy's *Neue Zeit*, and it won praise from both Engels and Kautsky. At the beginning of the article Plekhanov expresses his intellectual debt to Engels, writing that his own essay was guided 'by the hand of a master', that of Engels.⁶⁵ It is in this essay that Plekhanov coins the term 'dialectical materialism'. Marx never employs the phrase; it is Plekhanov's own construct.

Plekhanov begins his essay by stressing that 'Hegel's philosophy formed and steeled the thinking' (401) of many revolutionary thinkers, including Marx and Engels. A giant in his own lifetime, Hegel was by 1891 disparaged by the educated classes, yet Plekhanov forecasts that a revival of interest in his work is sure to come. To Plekhanov, Hegel's greatness as a thinker lies in the fact that 'for Hegel, philosophy was nothing more than the intellectual expression of its time'.⁶⁶ This is true not only of philosophy but also of 'religion and law ... art, and even technology'.⁶⁷ In addition, Hegel's concept of stages of historical development fascinates Plekhanov. Although Hegel is clearly an idealist, one should not 'limit one's criticism of Hegel's philosophy of history to scornfully shrugging one's shoulders at its extreme idealism'.⁶⁸ Instead, Hegel can teach Marxists 'consistency of thought'.⁶⁹

Plekhanov then takes up some of the major themes of Hegel's *Philosophy of History* and *Philosophy of Right*, reading them materialistically. He stresses that much of Hegel's description of the differences between the various ancient civilisations is grounded in material and political factors rather than only spiritual and mental ones. This, he says, is also true of Hegel's account of the Protestant Reformation: 'Thus, Hegel puts us on the way to the materialist conception of history ... Expressing it in the terms used by Hegel, we can say that materialism is the truth of idealism. The greatest idealist seems to have set

64 On this point, see Baron 1963, the most thorough overall study of his life and work. Baron quotes a letter where Plekhanov writes: 'That it is necessary to insult Kant I have always thought and never ceased thinking' (p. 289).

65 Plekhanov 1974, p. 402.

66 Plekhanov 1974, p. 405.

67 Plekhanov 1974, p. 406.

68 Plekhanov 1974, p. 408.

69 Ibid.

himself the task of clearing the road for materialism'.⁷⁰ In particular, argues Plekhanov, Hegel often stresses 'economic development' as a key to historical change.⁷¹ Because of this grounding in economic and material factors, 'Hegel's absolute idealism was very far from the naive idealism of the Enlightenment'.⁷²

Plekhanov is fascinated by Hegel's use of geographic factors to describe ancient civilisations, and on this point Plekhanov's theorising is, in terms of Marxist theory, both original and flawed. As the Thomist Marx scholar Gustav Wetter writes: 'A crucial defect of Plekhanov's historical materialism is also discernible in the exaggerated influence he attaches to the geographical factor ... Plekhanov eventually comes to regard Marxism as "Darwinism in its application to social science"'.⁷³ Plekhanov's emphasis on geography is part of an overall evolutionist perspective, but even here, Plekhanov is only exaggerating something already present in Engels, who in his speech at Marx's grave side compared Marx to Darwin: 'Just as Darwin discovered the law of development of nature, so Marx discovered the law of development of human history'.⁷⁴

For it is not only on geographic factors but also more generally that Plekhanov reduces the dialectics of negativity and of the subject to an evolutionary 'monist' concept of fixed laws of historical development: 'Thanks to Marx, materialist philosophy has been elevated to an integral, harmonious and consistent world outlook ... Like Hegel, he saw human history as a process conforming to laws and independent of man's arbitrariness; ... like Hegel, he endeavoured to trace to a universal and single *source* all the acting and interacting forces of social life. But he found that source not in the absolute spirit, but in ... economic development'.⁷⁵ Combining this schematic economism with the notion that ideas are a mere reflection of the material world, Plekhanov has created something that he dubs 'dialectical materialism', defining its central tenet as 'the truth that people make history unconsciously', because not 'man's will' but 'material productive forces' determine 'the course of history'.⁷⁶

This evolutionist and scientific reading of Hegel and Marx is softened slightly in the concluding pages of the essay, where Plekhanov attempts to separate himself a little from evolutionism: 'It is sometimes said that the standpoint of dialectics is identical with that of evolution ... Nevertheless between

70 Plekhanov 1974, p. 412.

71 Plekhanov 1974, p. 416.

72 Plekhanov 1974, p. 417.

73 Wetter 1958 [1952], p. 107.

74 Engels 1989 [1883], p. 467.

75 Plekhanov 1974, p. 422.

76 Ibid.

them there is a profound and important difference ... They [evolutionists] want to prove that there are no leaps either in nature or history. Dialectics, on the other hand, knows full well that in nature and also in human thought and history leaps are inevitable'.⁷⁷ Not only is this a rather tepid and qualified critique of evolutionism, but more importantly, Plekhanov's concept of 'leaps' is barren of any notion of a human subject. Following Engels, but taking the latter's evolutionism further, Plekhanov has constructed a dialectical materialism in which the human subject almost disappears. His materialist reading of Hegel is accomplished by avoiding Hegel's key works on dialectics in favour of his historical and political writings. In so doing, he unwittingly reverses the process of Marx's own confrontation with Hegel, for Marx had in 1843 scathingly attacked Hegel's political philosophy as essentially conservative, whereas in 1844, as noted earlier, he found elements out of which to construct a revolutionary dialectic in one of Hegel's most abstract works, the *Phenomenology of Mind*. Missing completely from Plekhanov's 1891 reading of Hegel are key dialectical categories such as the negation of the negation, the needed unity of idealism and materialism, or even the concept of contradiction.⁷⁸

3 Lenin and Hegel before 1914

Before 1914 Lenin held to the concept of dialectical materialism as elaborated by Engels and Plekhanov. In his first major published work, *What the Friends of the People Are, and How They Fight the Social Democrats* (1894), written when he was only twenty-four years old, Lenin makes his seemingly sharpest attack against Hegelian dialectics. He quotes approvingly the following statement made in the 1870s by the Populist Nikolai Mikhailovsky: 'If we remove from *Capital* the heavy, clumsy, and unnecessary lid of Hegelian dialectics then, apart from the other merits of this essay, we shall observe in it splendidly elaborated material for an answer to the general question of the relation of the forms to the material conditions of their existence, and the excellent formulation of this question for a definite sphere'.⁷⁹ In this same essay, Lenin also argues that in the

⁷⁷ Plekhanov 1974, p. 423.

⁷⁸ Plekhanov presents an essentially similar view of Hegel and dialectics in his later works, whether in *The Monist View of History*, 1947 [1895], or in his last major work, *Fundamental Problems of Marxism* 1969 [1908], although he does occasionally take up the concept of contradiction.

⁷⁹ *CW* 1:180.

1873 afterword to *Capital*, 'Marx says plainly that his method is the 'direct opposite' of Hegel's method'.⁸⁰ Much has been made of these statements of the young Lenin, especially by the extreme anti-Hegelian Marxists Althusser and Colletti, who have argued that Lenin showed a profound and essentially correct grasp of Hegel in 1894.⁸¹

One problem with such an interpretation is that the context of Lenin's preceding statements seems to show that his purpose there is not to make a broad assessment of Hegel's work. For example, he never quotes Hegel directly, apparently not having read him yet. His purpose is far more limited. He is attempting to defend Marx from Mikhailovsky's new charge in the 1890s that Marx's method was determined by Hegelian dialectics and is therefore false and distorted.⁸² In 1894 Lenin was interested not so much in attacking Hegel as in showing what he thought was an embarrassing inconsistency in his opponent's position. Lenin quotes Mikhailovsky's statement to prove that the latter once believed that Marx's *Capital* was based 'on an exposition of ... materialism',⁸³ something that Mikhailovsky seems to deny by 1894.

A close reading of Lenin's 1894 book shows that he nowhere endorses Mikhailovsky's 1877 view that the 'heavy, clumsy, and unnecessary lid of Hegelian dialectics' mars *Capital*. Such a position, is, however, similar to that of Althusser and Colletti, which is probably why they have given this quotation great emphasis in their discussions on Lenin and Hegel. Nonetheless, I see no evidence that Lenin is taking such an extreme anti-Hegelian stance here. He is simply affirming a standard orthodox Marxist position of the day. He is, similar to Engels and Plekhanov, a convinced scientific materialist who sees the main division in philosophy as that between the two camps of idealism and materialism. Although Marx's dialectic is accordingly the direct opposite of Hegel's, nowhere does Lenin call for the removal of Hegelian influences from *Capital*, nor does he deny categorically that Hegel exercised a significant influence on Marx's mature work. Rather, he argues that Marx took over and transformed Hegel's idealist dialectic into a materialist one.

This argument is seen in Lenin's 1896 memorial article on Engels, where he writes that Engels was 'a follower' of Hegel in the 1840s. In that article he also discusses Hegel's general importance for Marxism:

80 CW 1:167.

81 For an exposition and critique of their interpretations, see Chapter 8.

82 In this case, Mikhailovsky is repeating one of the arguments made against Marx in the 1870s by the German academic Eugen Dühring, and Lenin is repeating some of the argument of Engels's *Anti-Dühring*.

83 CW 1:180.

Although Hegel himself was an admirer of the autocratic Prussian state, in whose service he was a professor at Berlin University, Hegel's *teachings* were revolutionary. Hegel's faith in human reason and its rights, and the fundamental thesis of Hegelian philosophy that the universe is undergoing a constant process of change and development, led some of the disciples of the Berlin philosopher – those who refused to accept the existing situation – to the idea that the struggle against this situation, the struggle against existing wrong and prevalent evil, is also rooted in the universal law of eternal development.⁸⁴

Thus, the young Lenin is hardly dismissing or rejecting Hegel; he is, similar to Plekhanov, a bit more enthusiastic about Hegel than were the leading theoreticians of the Second International.

Lenin's next important discussion of dialectics came fourteen years later, in *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* (1908), a polemic against A.A. Bogdanov,⁸⁵ a Bolshevik theorist who attempted to connect Marxism to empiriocriticism, a branch of positivism developed around the turn of the century by the philosophers Ernst Mach and Richard Avenarius.⁸⁶ In this controversy Lenin's position is no less positivist and scientific than is that of Bogdanov and the philosophers of empiriocriticism. In addition, the vituperative and scholastic style of Lenin's book gives it a well-deserved reputation for crudity and dogmatism.⁸⁷

Although this work became famous after Lenin's death, *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* was hardly, then or later, 'the theoretical preparation for the Bolshevik Party', as the official Moscow preface claims.⁸⁸ If this was also Lenin's view, then it is surprising that his brief 1921 chronology, 'Notes on the History of the R.C.P. [Russian Communist Party]', written for Bukharin, does not even list the year 1908, and the years 1909–1910 are simply titled 'liquidationism' (CW 36:553). In Lenin's eyes, evidently, this is no fundamental work but rather the product of an obscure polemic inside Bolshevism during the years of despair and defeat that followed the 1905 revolution. When he allowed the book to be

84 CW 2:21

85 For a discussion of Bogdanov's writings, see Sochor 1988. Sochor regards Bogdanov as an original Marxist thinker, whom she counterposes to Lenin. Although her book is well documented with respect to Bogdanov, she does not take up Lenin's Hegel Notebooks and shows no awareness of over seventy years of critique of positivism by Western Marxists.

86 For a sharp critique of Mach's positivism, see Habermas 1971.

87 For a scathing critique, see Merleau-Ponty's chapter 'Pravda' in Merleau-Ponty 1973. For more positive assessments of *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* by Marxist theorists, see Ruben 1977 and Althusser 1971.

88 CW 14:11.

republished in 1920, Lenin did write that its subject matter was 'the philosophy of Marxism, dialectical materialism'. However, he makes it clear that this was not so much 'in general' or for the world Marxist movement but rather mainly in reference to a critique of his old opponent Bogdanov's concept of 'proletarian culture', which was gaining a following among Soviet youth and intellectuals in the early 1920s.⁸⁹ Lenin seemed in no hurry to publish the book in the West during his lifetime; it did not appear there in translations until 1927, after Lenin's death and just a few years before the Hegel Notebooks appeared in German and French. Given that fact, the tenacity with which both Leninists and anti-Leninists hold to this early book as the main or even the sole expression of Lenin on philosophy is indeed striking. This attitude tells a great deal about them and little about Lenin, and it tells nothing at all about the crucial philosophic break that, as I am arguing here, helped to give direction to the actual theory and politics of the 1917 revolution. Official Soviet-based editions unfortunately confused the matter even further for many years by publishing the quite innovative essay 'On the Question of Dialectics' (1915) as an 'addendum' to *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* and wrongly attributing it to the years 1912–14, before Lenin studied Hegel intensively.

David Joravsky has already done the painstaking work necessary to cut *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* down to size and put it in its proper context. As Joravsky shows, the book does not spell out anywhere the Stalinist concept of 'partyness in philosophy'. More than that, for the five years before the breakup in 1908, Lenin's Bolsheviks had several prominent 'Machists' working relatively harmoniously within the faction's leadership, as did the Mensheviks, to a lesser extent.⁹⁰ And although Lenin's attack on Machism in *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* is both dogmatic and a vulgarisation of Marxism, and certainly narrowly materialist, there is little that is original about the philosophical positions Lenin espouses there. They are the standard Plekhanov-type 'dialectical materialism'. In addition, far from Lenin being previously intolerant of 'unorthodox' philosophical ideas among intellectuals in his Bolshevik faction, the reverse is true. Joravsky shows at great length that it was Lenin's Bolsheviks who for years tolerated the Machist Bogdanov in the leadership, and the final breakup in 1908 was only partially because of 'philosophy'. In fact, Joravsky shows that, unlike the Mensheviks, who viewed philosophic questions in a manner not substantially different from Plekhanov,⁹¹ the Bolsheviks main-

89 *CW* 14:21.

90 See Joravsky 1961, pp. 24–43. See also Graham 1970, especially pp. 42–7.

91 In his *Plekhanov*, Baron argues that Plekhanov had a far narrower view than did Lenin of those philosophical points of view that were acceptable within the Marxist camp.

tained for years a deliberate policy of neutrality on philosophical issues, which by common agreement were not discussed in their publications.

Even when, with the publication of *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*, philosophy became an issue in the argument between Lenin and Bogdanov, this was linked to the fact that Plekhanov and another Menshevik theorist, P.B. Akselrod, had begun to attack the Bolsheviks for Machism. In the Mensheviks' account, the Bolsheviks combined 'un-Marxist' Leninist 'ultra-revolutionism' with an anti-Marxist philosophy, Machism. When the Menshevik leaders added that Lenin's indifference to, and even ignorance of, philosophy simply left the field within Bolshevism to Bogdanov and Machism, Lenin apparently decided to write his own philosophical work separating himself from Machism. Perhaps the final straw came in 1908, when *Neue Zeit*, the most prestigious journal in the world Marxist movement (and which never published Lenin), published Bogdanov's article 'Ernst Mach and Revolution'. As Joravsky points out: 'In a little preface the translator informed the German audience that the Russians had unfortunately made a political issue of Mach: the Bolsheviks had made his philosophy the basis of their faction, while the Mensheviks defended the materialism of Spinoza and Holbach'.⁹² Perhaps even this would have been allowed to pass by Lenin had not Bogdanov and he at this very time entered into a major political quarrel over whether to abstain from the tsar's limited parliamentary elections. Bogdanov wanted to keep abstention as a tendency within Bolshevism, whereas Lenin wanted to break with abstentionism very firmly. Possibly he attacked Bogdanov to reunite with the 'party Mensheviks' of the 'orthodox Center' of Menshevism, as exemplified by Plekhanov, who also opposed abstentionism.⁹³

Thus, *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*, far from being a specifically Leninist original work on philosophy, was intended instead as a reaffirmation of standard Second International Marxist orthodoxy on the question of dialectical materialism. And even at the Bolshevik faction meeting, where the participants defeated a proposal to keep Bogdanov's position on abstaining from elections as one tendency within Bolshevism and Bogdanov walked out to form his own group, a motion that empiriocriticism also be explicitly condemned was defeated.

In *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* Lenin spends over 300 pages arguing such concepts as the material existence of the objective world independent of human consciousness. Not content to charge his opponents with idealism or

92 Joravsky 1961, p. 32.

93 Joravsky 1961, p. 38.

solipsism, he evidently felt the necessity to show their reactionary character by attributing a necessary link to mysticism or the conservative religious views of the British philosopher George Berkeley, using parallel quotations to do so. Seldom if ever is Marx cited as a source – but there are plenty of quotations on materialism from Feuerbach, Plekhanov, and Engels.

Lenin repeatedly ties his opponents, and idealism generally, to mysticism and religion: ‘Philosophical idealism is nothing but a disguised and embellished ghost story’.⁹⁴ The extreme crudity of Lenin’s materialism is seen in his statement that theory is nothing more than a direct reflection of objective reality: ‘The recognition of theory as a copy, as an approximate copy of objective reality, is materialism’.⁹⁵ He writes further that ‘the materialist regards sensation, perception, idea, and the mind of man generally, as an image of objective reality’.⁹⁶ This is what is often termed Lenin’s photocopy or reflection theory of knowledge. Any other view means falling into mysticism and spiritualism, Lenin maintains.

Another concern is what Lenin’s book shows about his relation to Hegel. Despite its overall crudity, which is light-years removed from the Hegelian or Marxist concepts of dialectic, those looking for explicit attacks on Hegel in this work will find it disappointing. At the same time that he attacks Bogdanov, Mach, and Avenarius, Lenin follows Engels and Plekhanov in his general praise of Hegel as a founder of dialectical materialism, or at least a worthy precursor.⁹⁷ Aside from Bogdanov and Machism, Lenin’s chief enemy is not Hegel but Kant.⁹⁸ Lenin calls Hegelian dialectics the ‘pearl’ that his opponents ‘could not pick out from the dunghheap of absolute idealism’.⁹⁹ There are also plenty of Engelsian critiques of Hegel, such as when Lenin refers to the absolute idea as ‘a theological invention of the idealist Hegel’.¹⁰⁰ In one passage, however, there is a glimmer of what he would develop later in the Hegel Notebooks, the stress on dialectics as far more important than materialism: ‘Marx and Engels laid the emphasis in their works rather on *dialectical* materialism than on dialectical *materialism*, and insisted on *historical* materialism rather than on historical *materialism*’.¹⁰¹ But this critique of too narrow a reliance on materialism rather than on dialectics could easily be applied to Lenin’s own book. Materialism

94 CW 14:182.

95 CW 14:265.

96 CW 14:267.

97 CW 14:127, 137, 226–7.

98 CW 14:127, 168, 232.

99 CW 14:243.

100 CW 14:227.

101 CW 14:329.

rather than dialectic or history is in fact where Lenin also places the emphasis, in keeping with the Marxist orthodoxy of the time.

The following passage, free of polemical material, states the core of Lenin's position on Marxism and Hegel in *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*:

Marx ... was able through Feuerbach to take directly the materialist road against idealism. Thirty years later, in the afterword to the second edition of the first volume of *Capital*, Marx just as clearly and definitely contrasted *his materialism* to Hegel's *idealism*, i.e., the most consistent and most developed idealism; he contemptuously brushed Comtean 'positivism' aside and dubbed as wretched epigoni the contemporary philosophers who imagined they had destroyed Hegel when in reality they had reverted to a repetition of the pre-Hegelian errors of Kant and Hume ... because they were incapable of understanding Hegel's dialectics and treated him with scorn. And finally, take the various philosophical utterances by Marx in *Capital* and other works, and you will find an invariable basic motif: insistence upon *materialism* and contemptuous derision of all obscurity, of all confusion and deviations toward *idealism*. All Marx's philosophical utterances revolve within these two fundamental opposites, and from the standpoint of professorial philosophy, their defect lies in this 'narrowness' and 'one-sidedness'. In reality, this refusal to recognise the hybrid projects for reconciling materialism and idealism constitutes the great merit of Marx, who moved *forward* along a sharply-defined philosophical road.¹⁰²

Here are all the basic elements common to orthodox Marxism at that time: there is a bow to Feuerbach as well as to Hegel and a dismissal of Comtean positivism, Kant, and Hume. Then, despite the bow to Hegel, one finds the basic motif of *Capital* to be 'insistence on materialism'. The last sentence best shows the break in Lenin's thought after he studied Hegel in 1914, for in 1908 Lenin adamantly rejects all 'hybrid projects for reconciling materialism and idealism'. This is all done in the name of Marx, with Lenin unaware of Marx's 1844 *Manuscripts* and ignoring the differences between Marx's 'Theses on Feuerbach' and Engels's views.

Emergent Stalinism would vulgarise this mechanistic work even further. Moreover, it tore out of context the concept of partyness in philosophy, which Lenin in 1908 used in only a general sense of philosophers becoming Marxists and materialists, not as the need to adhere to one particular party.¹⁰³ By

102 CW 14:337–8.

103 For a discussion, see Joravsky 1961, pp. 24–36. The Russian word *partinost* has also been

the 1930s Lenin's book came to serve as a battering ram to stifle any and all philosophical debates that did not begin at the top. Even when the 1908 work is taken in its proper context, however, it is still a very far cry from the Hegelian Marxism that, I will argue, began to emerge in 1914. To the extent that Lenin practised dialectics before 1914, it was more at a political or economic level than at a philosophical one, as a revolutionary activist and theorist with a very sensitive nose for new stages or types of revolt, mass movements, and grassroots forms of revolutionary organisation. His writings on the 1905 revolution are dialectical in the sense of seeing the mass movement as a self-developing one rather than trying to impose 'party Bolshevism' on it. So too were the writings of Trotsky and Luxemburg. At the same time, however, in 1908 all the important theorists in the left wing of the Second International – Luxemburg and Trotsky, as well as Lenin – bowed to the type of scientific materialism found in Engels and Plekhanov. Only one of them, Lenin, went on to make a serious study of Hegelian dialectics.

4 The 1914 Encyclopedia Article 'Karl Marx'

Lenin apparently began looking into Hegelian dialectics as part of his work for the article 'Karl Marx', written for a Russian encyclopedia apparently between August and early November 1914. As soon as this essay was completed, however, Lenin asked for it back from the publisher to develop further the section on dialectics. This essay shows, side by side, the old, pre-1914, pre-Hegel Lenin and the new Lenin beginning to emerge in 1914 under the impact of studying Hegel. This essay, which runs nearly fifty pages, appears to be a fairly serious and comprehensive attempt by Lenin to expound his own newly developing view of Marxism. The encyclopedia article begins with a discussion of Marxist philosophy. Nadezhda Krupskaya, Lenin's wife, remarks in her memoirs: 'This article, dealing with the teaching of Marx, opens with an outline of his philosophy under two headings: "Philosophic Materialism" and "Dialectics", followed by an exposition of Marx's economic theory, in which he describes Marx's approach to the question of socialism and the tactics of the class struggle of the proletariat. Marx's teaching was not usually presented in this way'.¹⁰⁴ One should not underestimate the newness of this type of approach in 1914, after the Second

translated as 'partisanship', but, following Joravsky, I have rendered it as 'partyiness'. Some of these issues are discussed further in Chapter 7.

104 Krupskaya 1960, pp. 295–6.

International had for over a generation made economics rather than dialectics the foundation of and key to Marxism.

As Dunayevskaya has argued: 'Scores of "popularisations" of Marxian economics had been written. Lenin's Essay is the first, since the death of Marx and Engels, to show the primacy of a philosophical approach'.¹⁰⁵ In this article Lenin constantly refers to dialectics, also making some extensive comments on what he sees dialectics to be. Although he begins with Engels's concept of dialectic as a process rather than as something static and also shows many influences from Plekhanov, he is beginning to develop beyond them, apparently under the influence of his Hegel studies. He now sees dialectics as

far more comprehensive and richer than the current idea of evolution is. A development that repeats, as it were, stages that have already been passed, but repeats them in a different way, on a higher basis ('the negation of the negation'), a development, so to speak, that proceeds in spirals, not in a straight line; a development by leaps and catastrophes, and revolutions; 'breaks in continuity'; the transformation of quantity into quality; inner impulses toward development, imparted by the contradiction and conflict of the various forces and tendencies acting on a given body, or within a given phenomenon, or within a given society; the interdependence and the closest and indissoluble connection between all aspects of any phenomenon ... these are some of the features of dialectics as a doctrine of development that is richer than the conventional one.¹⁰⁶

The preceding was to some extent a move beyond the orthodox Marxism current in 1914, especially in its reference to Hegel's concept of negation of the negation and in Lenin's stress, as against Engels and Plekhanov, that dialectics is a theory of development through leaps, breaks, and negations rather than a variety of scientific evolutionism, as Engels's writings had suggested.

What is new here in 1914 can be seen by looking at another essay on Marx that Lenin published the previous year, before beginning his Hegel studies. In this article, 'The Three Sources and Three Component Parts of Marxism', he gives little attention to dialectics and stresses that the 'philosophy of Marxism is materialism'. In this article Lenin says that Marx combined 'eighteenth-century materialism' with 'the achievements of German classical philosophy, especially of Hegel's system, which in its turn led to the materialism of Feuerbach'. Lenin's

105 Dunayevskaya 1988, p. 168.

106 CW 21:54–55

emphasis in 1913 on materialism over dialectics also extends to a form of scientism that echoes Engels: 'The latest discoveries of natural science ... have been a remarkable confirmation of Marx's dialectical materialism'.¹⁰⁷ This is the sole mention of dialectics in the entire essay.

In most respects, however, the 1914 essay 'Karl Marx' is still within the bounds of what Engels and Plekhanov had already developed, albeit without the stress on either natural science (Engels) or stages of historical evolution (Plekhanov). When Lenin takes up Marx's 'Theses on Feuerbach', he quotes only the eleventh thesis in Engels's edited version, giving it, as did Engels, a reading that stresses practice and activity. Finally, most of the direct quotations in the section on dialectics come from Engels, with just a few from Marx and none from Hegel.

In fact, a section entitled 'Philosophical Materialism' directly precedes the one entitled 'Dialectics'. Here Lenin, following Engels and Plekhanov, still appears to place Marx's views closer to Feuerbach's than to Hegel's: 'Beginning with the years 1844–45, when his views took shape, Marx was a materialist, and especially a follower of Ludwig Feuerbach, whose weak points he subsequently saw only in his materialism being insufficiently consistent and comprehensive. To Marx Feuerbach's historic and "epoch-making" significance lay in his having resolutely broken with Hegel's idealism and in his proclamation of materialism'.¹⁰⁸ In this passage Lenin fails to mention Marx's 'Theses on Feuerbach', in which the first thesis calls Feuerbach's materialism contemplative and concludes that subjectivity and the active side have been better developed by idealism. Instead, Lenin repeats what he said in 1908, which was part of the Marxist orthodoxy of the time. He writes, like Engels, that Feuerbach's error was to create an 'insufficiently consistent' materialism, but that otherwise, Marx was 'a follower' of Feuerbach. Another way to see how tentative was Lenin's probing into dialectics in September and October 1914 is to look at the section on economics, which is the main section of the essay on Marx. This section is hardly connected to the brief but new section on dialectics. In relation to the main discussion of economics, the preceding section amounts to little more than a bow toward dialectics.

Lenin also develops some innovative positions on the peasantry in this essay on Marx, viewing not only the workers but also the peasants as a revolutionary subject. Nevertheless, giving major attention to dialectics was even more of an innovation for Lenin, since he had already written quite a bit on the peasantry. Lenin's treatment here of the peasantry as a revolutionary subject alongside

107 CW 19:24.

108 CW 21:50.

the working class is also an implicit critique of Kautsky. The latter's influential book *The Agrarian Question* (1897) argued that the peasantry was a rapidly dying social class and gave little attention to developing a socialist agrarian programme.¹⁰⁹

Lenin was fully aware of just which points in his presentation would be controversial within Marxism. In a letter dated 17 November 1914, that accompanied the manuscript to Russia, he urged the publishers not to cut his lengthy quotations from Marx, because they were needed to substantiate 'especially the most controversial questions of Marxism, which include philosophy and the agrarian problem first and foremost'.¹¹⁰ Only six weeks later, having continued his Hegel studies, Lenin was already dissatisfied with part of the essay. On 4 January 1915, he wrote again to the publisher: 'I shall be very grateful if you send me a proof, or drop me a postcard about *when* it could be expected. By the way, is there still time for some corrections to the section on dialectics? Perhaps you will be so kind as to let me know when it is being sent for setting, and what the deadline is for corrections. It is a question I have been working on these last six weeks, and I think I could add something if there is still time'.¹¹¹ Here Lenin's correspondence seems to indicate that some key changes in his views on dialectics had occurred in the six weeks preceding 4 January 1915. Since his 'Abstract of Hegel's *Science of Logic*' ends with the date 17 December 1914, the six weeks referred to evidently were the very period when he made that abstract.

By January 1915 it seemed clear to Lenin that even what Krupskaya had called the unusual procedure of giving great emphasis to 'dialectics' in the Marx essay was inadequate and that the future demanded an even more central role for Hegelian dialectics in his Marxism. It should also be noted, however, that even by January 1915, after he had completed his 'Abstract of Hegel's *Science of Logic*' and was talking of revising the section on dialectics further, he was still not talking of reworking his concept of Marxism as a whole. This would emerge, I will argue later, in the process of confronting the political issues of 1915 to 1917, partially on the basis of the new concept of dialectic worked out in the Hegel Notebooks of 1914–15. Only after he completed his study of Hegel's *Science of Logic* in mid-December 1914 and spent much of 1915 on Hegelian dialectics as well did he begin to carry themes from his Hegel studies into a reexamination of his basic concepts of Marxism centred on politics and economics.¹¹² This was hardly the case in the essay on Karl Marx. In the next chapter I begin to examine closely those Hegel Notebooks.

109 For a discussion, see Esther Kingston-Mann 1985: 41–54.

110 *CW* 35:173.

111 *CW* 36:317.

112 I take up the influence of Hegel on Lenin's social and political theory in Chapters 5 and 6.

Lenin on Hegel's Concepts of Being and Essence

1 Lenin Begins to Read Hegel

Although it is unclear exactly when Lenin began his Hegel Notebooks and when he finished his encyclopedia article on Marx, it appears that he was not very far into his 'Abstract of Hegel's *Science of Logic*' before completing the Marx article. I therefore took up the encyclopedia article first.¹ I have for the moment left aside his political writings in 1914 and early 1915, but not because I am trying to dismiss them. In an attempt to illustrate how all these writings and activities are interrelated, I will first discuss the entire 1914 'Abstract of Hegel's *Science of Logic*', which was written between October and late December 1914, before examining in a later chapter Lenin's key 1914–15 political writings on war and revolution. Most of the latter were composed after his study of the *Science of Logic* or while he was continuing his studies of other works by and on Hegel in 1915. This format of presentation reverses the procedure in many studies of Lenin, which tend to stress the political over the theoretical, but I believe that it more accurately reflects Lenin's thinking in 1914–15.²

In this and the next chapter I turn directly to Lenin's 'Abstract of Hegel's *Science of Logic*', the most important part of his Hegel Notebooks. His reading of the *Science of Logic* was followed in 1915 by his fairly extensive notes on Hegel's *History of Philosophy* and *Philosophy of History* and the important draft for an essay on dialectics, as well as several shorter pieces on Hegel. I will explore the question of Lenin's attitude toward Hegel, to see in detail what his notes disclose about his concept of dialectic in 1914–15.

1 It should also be mentioned here that in the autumn of 1914, in addition to producing the extensive 'Abstract of Hegel's *Science of Logic*', Lenin also wrote a brief twenty-page abstract of Feuerbach's *Lectures on the Essence of Religion*. Focusing on materialism, these notes were apparently written just before he began his Hegel studies. In early editions of Lenin's *Philosophical Notebooks* these notes on Feuerbach are dated 1909 rather than 1914. I do not take them up, since they do not deal with Hegel very much.

2 For a different approach, see, for example, Service 1991, chap. 3. Service begins his discussion of Lenin in 1914–15 with politics and then concludes with the Hegel Notebooks, even though most of the notes were written before the political activity described in this chapter. This implies that the Hegel Notebooks were being driven by political activities and issues, whereas I want to look at Lenin's work from another angle, that of his study of Hegelian dialectics.

The 'Abstract of Hegel's *Science of Logic*' and most of the later parts of the Hegel Notebooks consist of long extracts from Hegel's works together with Lenin's own marginal notes and other commentary. Lenin studied the 1883 German edition of Hegel's *Science of Logic*, and his extracts from Hegel are almost always in German, while his own comments are usually in Russian. More than three-fourths of the notebooks consists of long extracts from Hegel. The first half of Lenin's 'Abstract of Hegel's *Science of Logic*', about seventy pages, is devoted to the prefaces, introduction, and the first two books of the *Science of Logic*, 'The Doctrine of Being' and 'The Doctrine of Essence', each of them part of Volume 1, 'Objective Logic'.³ The second half of Lenin's abstract, also about seventy pages, is devoted to Volume 2 of the *Science of Logic*, 'Subjective Logic, or the Doctrine of the Notion'. I will cover the first half of Lenin's abstract, on objectivity and the doctrines of being and essence, in this chapter and his notes on subjectivity and the doctrine of the notion in Chapter 3. In Chapter 4 I take up briefly his 1914–15 writings on war and revolution and then survey his various notes, drafts, and commentary on Hegel and dialectics from 1915 to 1923.

In the present and following chapters I will be keeping several issues in mind as I discuss the 'Abstract of Hegel's *Science of Logic*' and Lenin's other notes on Hegel. (1) I will look at which passages from Hegel Lenin took down and commented on. What did he find significant about these parts of the *Science of Logic*, and how do they fit into Hegel's text? (2) I will compare and contrast what Lenin is doing with Hegel in 1914–15 to the earlier writings of Marx, Engels, and Plekhanov, as well as to Lenin's own pre-1914 writings, all of which were taken up in the previous chapter. (3) I will compare and contrast Lenin's focus in 1914–15 to that of other, more recent studies of Hegel, especially Marxist ones. In this undertaking I will rely mainly on works by the following authors, who have written substantially on the *Science of Logic*: the Marxist theorists Lukács, Dunayevskaya, and Marcuse, as well as the non-Marxist Hegel scholars John Burbidge, J.N. Findlay, Errol Harris, Charles Taylor, and Robert Pippin.⁴ At issue here will be how Lenin reads Hegel's text differently from these later comment-

3 Here and elsewhere, page numbers are based on the standard English editions of Hegel's *Science of Logic* (Miller translation) and of Lenin's *Collected Works*. See the bibliography for these references. But as mentioned above, I have often substituted the clearer translation in Dunayevskaya 1958 of Lenin's notes on Hegel.

4 I will consult Lukács 1971a [1923]; Marcuse 1960 [1941]; Dunayevskaya 1989 [1973], as well as two of her unpublished manuscripts, 'Rough Notes on Hegel's *Science of Logic*' (1961), pp. 2815–33; and 'Notes on a Series of Lectures: Lenin on Hegel's *Science of Logic*' (1967), pp. 3885–906, both of them in Dunayevskaya 1981–9; Findlay 1958; Taylor 1975; Burbidge 1981; Harris 1983; Pippin 1989. [Findlay, Burbidge, and Pippin are not in references but are given in full in my original footnote.].

ators, as well as which parts of the text Lenin seems to skip over versus what these other commentators have taken up.

(4) I will also assess the evolution of Lenin's own concept of dialectic as expressed in his commentary on Hegel. This becomes especially important in the later parts of the 'Abstract of Hegel's *Science of Logic*', where toward the end of his notes, Lenin makes more long summaries for himself on dialectics and copies fewer extracts from Hegel's text. (5) Where it seems appropriate I will also refer to previous commentaries on Lenin's Hegel Notebooks, but this terrain is so full of argument and polemic that I can take account of only a small part of it as I discuss the Hegel Notebooks directly. I will take up many of these more systematically in Chapters 7 and 8, when I examine the fate of Lenin's notebooks after publication, especially with regard to Western Marxism. (6) Finally, I should state at the outset what I am *not* doing: although I will often try to situate Lenin's notes and commentary within particular parts of Hegel's texts, I am not attempting to make a general analysis of the *Science of Logic* or of Hegel's other works, something that would go far beyond the scope of this study. I will examine both Lenin's notes and Hegel's text mainly to get an adequate picture of how Lenin was using Hegel to reconstruct Marxist dialectics.

1.1 *Hegel's 1812 Preface and Lenin's Attempt to Invert Hegel*

On the first page of his 'Abstract of Hegel's *Science of Logic*', Lenin begins to explore Hegel's two prefaces, one written in 1812, when Hegel published the first volume of this work, and the other in 1831, the year of his death. Both prefaces present an overview of dialectical method and a critique of formal logic and positivistic thought. Lenin begins his abstract by taking down Hegel's arguments in the 1812 preface, arguments against formal logic's instrumentalist notion that 'one learns from logic how to think'.⁵ Lenin seems to agree with Hegel, calling his critique of logic as a mere technique 'a shrewd statement about logic'.⁶ He also takes down passages from Hegel's critique of positivism and scientism, such as the following: 'Philosophy ... cannot ... borrow its method from a subordinate science, like mathematics'.⁷ He also records Hegel's statement that 'reason is negative and dialectical'.⁸ Here Lenin seems to identify with some key Hegelian categories: critique of the notion of logic as a mere technique and the negative and critical character of reason.

5 SL 26.

6 CW 38:87.

7 SL 27.

8 SL 28

At this point, however, Lenin still accepts the simplistic view of the Marxism of the Second International that Hegel was an 'idealist' and Marx a 'materialist' and that therefore Hegel's dialectic needs merely to be 'inverted'. For example, after copying Hegel's statement that the 'development of all natural and mental [*geistigen*] life' is based on 'the content of logic',⁹ Lenin writes in an apparent summary statement on the entire 1812 preface: 'Invert it: Logic and the theory of knowledge must be derived from "the development of all natural and mental life"'.¹⁰

1.2 *The 1831 Preface: Lenin Perceives the Sensuous, Living Character of Hegel's Dialectic*

Lenin's notes on Hegel's 1831 preface are far more detailed. He concentrates on Hegel's critique of traditional (Kantian and pre-Kantian) logic as 'a meagre shred or a disordered heap of dead bones'.¹¹ Next to this critique of formal logic Lenin writes: 'what is necessary is not dead bones but living life'.¹² By now he does seem to identify more with the living character of Hegel's concept of logic, as opposed to formal logic.

Nevertheless, he continues to skip over, probably as too idealistic, statements such as the following, where Hegel stresses the power of human consciousness and reason: 'Nowadays we cannot be too often reminded that it is thinking which distinguishes man from the beasts'.¹³ Even more important, but referred to only perfunctorily by Lenin, is Hegel's brief statement of what logic is for him: 'If nature, as such, as the physical world, is contrasted with the mental sphere, then logic must certainly be said to be the supernatural element which permeates every relationship of man to nature, his sensation, intuition, desire, need, instinct'.¹⁴ Possibly Hegel's use of the term *supernatural* (*übernatürlich*) led Lenin to skip over much of this statement, and he records only the phrase about logic being something 'supernatural'.¹⁵

A bit later, however, Lenin seems to pay more attention to some historical and political issues apparently expressed in Hegel's remarks that philosophy first develops in a situation where 'the need to occupy oneself with pure thought presupposes that the human spirit [*Geist*] must already have travelled a long road. ... In the silent regions of thought which has come to itself and

9 SL 28.

10 CW 38:88.

11 SL 31.

12 CW 38:89.

13 SL 31.

14 SL 31–2.

15 CW 38:90.

communes only with itself, the interests which move the lives of races and individuals are hushed'.¹⁶ Lenin summarises and then quotes the last part of this statement and writes in the margin of his abstract: 'the relations of thought to interests and impulses'.¹⁷ Similar to Plekhanov, here he seems to be stressing the social and historical character of Hegel's philosophy and its compatibility with Marxist materialism in its stress on economic and class interests as major shapers of history.

A bit further on Lenin summarises Hegel's critique of Kant in the following manner: 'In my opinion, the essence of the argument is: (1) In Kant, cognition demarcates (divides) nature and man; actually it unites them; (2) In Kant, 'the empty abstraction' of the thing-in-itself instead of living process [*Gang*], movement [*Bewegung*], deeper and deeper, of our knowledge about things'.¹⁸ Here he is mainly repeating Plekhanov's defence of Hegel against Kant, arguing that Hegel's dialectic shows process and development, whereas Kant's dialectic is more static.

Lenin gives a positive summary of Hegel's view of logic a bit further on in his abstract: 'Logic is the doctrine not of external forms of thought, but of the laws of development "of all material, natural and mental [*geistige*] things", i.e., of the development of the total concrete content of the world and of its knowledge, i.e., the sum-total, the conclusion of the *history* of knowledge of the world'.¹⁹ This type of 'living, real content'²⁰ is, he seems to argue, what separates Hegel from Kant.

Most important of all, Lenin seems to have begun to identify with Hegel's concept of the importance of consciousness in human society and history: 'Man is confronted with a web of the phenomena of nature. Instinctive man, a savage, does not distinguish himself from nature. Conscious man does distinguish, categories are stages of distinguishing, i.e., of cognising the world, focal points in the web, which assist in cognising and mastering it'.²¹ In this passage Lenin seems to be moving away from the crude reflection theory of knowledge that he employed in *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*, where human consciousness was seen as a more or less direct reflection of the material world. Here consciousness develops the categories that enable the human being to understand and control natural forces. Lenin is beginning to embrace Hegel by the time he has completed his notes on these two prefaces to the *Science*

16 SL 34.

17 CW 38:90.

18 CW 38:91.

19 CW 38:92–93.

20 CW 38:92.

21 CW 38:93.

of *Logic*. As we have seen, however, he retains a great deal of reservation in his view of Hegel and either criticises and turns around, or seems to overlook, some of the most idealistic passages.

1.3 *The Introduction to the Science of Logic and Lenin on Objectivity and Subjectivity*

By the time he turns to Hegel's introduction to the *Science of Logic*, Lenin appears to agree with Hegel's view of logic as something that needs to incorporate 'historical explanations' and real content instead of constituting 'a science of thinking in general' that 'abstracts from all *content*'.²² Lenin begins his detailed notes at a point where Hegel turns to a critique of other German idealist philosophers, especially Fichte. He also records Hegel's important reference at this point to the *Phenomenology* and snippets of Hegel's critiques of Kant and Spinoza. Nonetheless, Lenin seems to dismiss some very important historical references in Hegel's text, such as the following critique of Kant: 'Kant moreover considers logic ... [as] having attained so early a completion before the other sciences ... Now if logic has not undergone any change since Aristotle ... then surely the conclusion which should be drawn is that it is all the more in need of a total reconstruction; for mind [*des Geistes*], after its labours over two thousand years, must have attained to a higher consciousness about its thinking and about its own, pure, essential nature'.²³ Lenin makes some derisive comments in a very brief summary of this passage as 'clericalism, God, the realm of truth, etc'.²⁴ He still seems to be shying away from any references to the Hegelian concept of mind or spirit, thus missing some of Hegel's most important arguments.

Although Lenin remains sceptical of Hegel's views on the 'world spirit' and so forth, he is attracted to the Hegelian concept of spontaneous self-development as opposed to rigid stages either in concepts or in history. Lenin takes down Hegel's statement that 'method is the consciousness of the form taken by the inner spontaneous movement of its content'.²⁵ He also notes for future reference that the material in Hegel's text that follows this 'gives a good explanation of dialectics'. It is here that Hegel makes a reference to the *Phenomenology*. Lenin is quick to appreciate Hegel's statement that 'the negative is just as much positive'.²⁶ He copies this and then notes that 'negation is

22 SL 43.

23 SL 51.

24 CW 38:96.

25 SL 53.

26 SL 54.

something definite, has a definite content, the inner contradictions lead to the replacement of the old content by a new, higher one. In the old logic there is no transition'.²⁷ Lenin is impressed by Hegel's concepts of negation and contradiction as keys to transition and forward movement, despite their idealistic character. He is already moving to some extent beyond the evolutionist schemata of Engels and Plekhanov and back toward Marx's earlier concept of negativity as the creative principle in Hegel's dialectic.

Lenin gives his own preliminary summary at this point, where it seems that he is already beginning to move beyond the views of the Second International: 'Hegel poses two fundamental premises: 1) 'the necessity of connection', 2) 'the immanent coming-to-be of distinctions'. Very important! This is what it means in my opinion: 1) The necessity of connection, the connection of all sides, forces, tendencies, etc. of the given sphere of phenomena. 2) The 'immanent coming-to-be of distinctions' – the inner, objective logic of the evolution of the struggle of the distinctions in a polarity'.²⁸ The concentration is not on any mere fluidity but on interconnection, on the one hand, and implicit contradiction, on the other.

Now Lenin begins to plunge directly into Hegel's idealism, arguing that it is wrong to draw too sharp a distinction between objectivity and subjectivity. He draws a rectangle around the following points in his commentary on Hegel and puts part of it in large block letters: 'Is not this the thought here, that appearance also is objective, since it is *one of the aspects* of the objective world? Not only *Wesen* [essence] but also *Schein* [show or illusory being] is objective. There is a difference between the subjective and the objective, BUT IT, TOO, HAS ITS LIMITS'.²⁹ Not only is appearance and not merely essence objective, but there is not so firm a distinction as Lenin had previously thought between objective and subjective. This distinction 'has its limits', he declares. Since Engels followers of Marx had held that the key to a Marxist analysis was getting beyond the surface appearance to the underlying essence of phenomena. This is the type of 'essentialist' thinking that Lenin is here questioning, following instead Hegel's view that appearance is after all the appearance of reality and thus important in and of itself. Appearance and essence certainly are contrary qualities at times, but they have an interrelationship even when they are. Equally important, Lenin has begun to engage the Hegelian concept of subjectivity.

Lenin also takes down Hegel's statement that in its dialectical form logic is no longer an 'abstract universal' but a 'universal which embraces within itself

27 CW 38:97.

28 CW 38:97.

29 CW 38:98.

the wealth of the particular'.³⁰ Lenin writes in the margin at this point 'cf. *Capital*'.³¹ This is the first of his many references to the relationship of Hegel's *Science of Logic* to Marx's *Capital*. It is also his first confrontation with the concept of the particular within Hegel's philosophy, where universal and particular are separate yet also connected to each other. The importance of the particular is sometimes overlooked within Marxist thought. As I will discuss later, Lenin's 1915–16 arguments over national liberation hinge on how a particular, in this case a national movement, connects to a universal, in this case socialist internationalism. In this argument Lenin held onto the distinctiveness of the particular, while his opponents wanted to move more rapidly to the universal, internationalism.³²

We have seen Lenin beginning to study Hegel. Already in his notes on the introduction to the *Science of Logic* he has begun to break with the simplistic categories of idealism versus materialism that had been the philosophical foundation of the Marxism of the Second International, including his own before 1914. He is finding materialism in Hegel's own text.

2 On 'The Doctrine of Being'

2.1 'With What Must the Science Begin?' Reading Hegel Materialistically
 'The Doctrine of Being' begins with an introductory section entitled 'With What Must the Science Begin?' The first phrase in this section that Lenin takes down and notes as very important is the following: 'there is nothing, nothing in heaven or in nature or mind or anywhere else which does not equally contain both immediacy and mediation'.³³ Lenin has two comments on this statement by Hegel. First, he writes rather predictably, 'heaven away: materialism', but his second comment shows much more affinity with Hegel's basic argument, especially concerning the concept of mediation: 'Everything is *vermittelt* = mediated, bound into One, connected by transitions'.³⁴

In this and subsequent passages Hegel is stressing that in the *Science of Logic* he will be showing a lengthy process of negation and development, carrying the reader from pure being to the absolute idea. As Burbidge puts it: 'Hegel contrasts the immediacy of the logical beginning within the context of free, self-contained thinking with the mediation by which consciousness progress-

³⁰ *SL* 58.

³¹ *CW* 38:99.

³² For more discussion, see Chapter 5.

³³ *SL* 68.

³⁴ *CW* 38:103.

ively overcomes its partiality to achieve the comprehensive universality of pure knowing'.³⁵ This is the pathway of the *Science of Logic*, but Hegel begins his work with the presentation of being and nothing. He then develops categories such as becoming that self-develop through a process of negation to ever-higher, more complex ones.

Lukács sees the preceding concept of immediacy and mediation in Hegel as a key link to Marx. Addressing those who believe that Marx in his mature work had only flirted occasionally with Hegel, he writes: 'Yet they failed to notice that a whole series of *categories of central importance and in constant use stem directly from Hegel's Logic*. We need only recall the Hegelian origin and the substantive and methodological importance of what is for Marx as fundamental a distinction as the one between immediacy and mediation'.³⁶ Lenin does not yet see the issue of immediacy and mediation in such a broad context.

At the same time Lenin continues to look on Hegel's idealism and the absolute with great suspicion. Thus he writes the following comment on the concluding paragraphs of this section: 'Nonsense about the absolute. I am in general trying to read Hegel materialistically: Hegel is materialism which has been stood on its head (according to Engels) – that is to say, I cast aside for the most part God, the Absolute, the Pure Idea, etc'.³⁷ Here we can see Lenin clinging to the scientific materialism of Engels and Plekhanov. Later he will nuance and even reject such simplistic views.

2.2 *Being, Nothing, Becoming*

Next Lenin takes up the much-discussed first chapter of Hegel's work, entitled 'Being', where the opposition between pure being and nothing is resolved into the process of becoming. Lenin copies extracts from Hegel's first triad of 'being-nothing-becoming' into his notes, but he does not comment on it. Here, Lenin's reserve can be contrasted once again to that of Lukács, who writes: 'It has often been claimed, and not without a certain justification, that the famous chapter in Hegel's *Logic* dealing with Being, Non-Being and Becoming contains the whole of his philosophy. It might be claimed with perhaps equal justification that the chapter [in *Capital*] dealing with the fetish character of the commodity contains the whole of historical materialism'.³⁸ Lenin does surprisingly little with this key first statement of Hegel's dialectic, and he certainly does not connect it to Marx.

35 Burbidge 1981, p. 37.

36 Lukács, 1967 preface to *History and Class Consciousness*, p. xlv (included in Lukács 1971a).

37 *CW* 38:104.

38 Lukács 1971a, p. 170.

He pounces excitedly, however, on Hegel's claim further on in the chapter that 'what is first in the Science had of necessity to show itself historically as the first'.³⁹ Lenin writes next to this passage: 'It sounds very materialistic!'⁴⁰ A bit later he summarises Hegel's critique of the concept of negation in Parmenides and Spinoza, which Hegel considers to be inadequately developed. Lenin takes down Hegel's statement that with these philosophers, 'there is no progress from being or absolute substance to the negative, to the finite'.⁴¹ Lenin connects this to a more general issue: the Hegelian type of interrelationship between infinity and finitude and between absolute and relative, writing in his notes: 'The absolute and the relative, the finite and the infinite = parts, stages of one and the same world. Perhaps?'.⁴² In general, however, Lenin does very little with this chapter on being, in which Hegel, after sketching out the dialectic of being-nothing-becoming, moves into five lengthy 'remarks' that critique much of Western philosophy.

2.3 *Determinate Being and Lenin's Embrace of the Dialectical Category of Transformation into Opposite*

As he moves into the second chapter of the *Science of Logic*, on determinate (specific forms of) being, Lenin takes down Hegel's quotation from Spinoza to the effect that every determination is also a negation.⁴³ When Lenin reaches Hegel's first statement of his concept of the negation of the negation, however, the very concept that was so central to Marx, and that is in fact a sharp critique of Spinoza, he takes down only part of it in his notes, writing: 'Here the exposition is somewhat fragmentary and highly obscure'.⁴⁴ He adds in the margin a quotation from Engels, 'abstract and abstruse Hegelianism', to justify skipping over of Hegel's difficult passage.

The section that Lenin for the most part skips over is where Hegel first develops the concept of the something [*Etwas*], a category within determinate being. Some of what Lenin ignores is the discussion on Hegel's concept of finitude, which centres on a notion that finite being is a self-contradictory form. A finite thing, which Hegel terms a something, is negatively related to an other [*Anderes*] that is beyond it and that forms the boundary between itself and a larger world. The something constitutes itself by not being an other, and thus the something is self-relating in and as negation. At the same time, the

39 SL 88.

40 CW 38:106.

41 SL 95.

42 CW 38:107.

43 SL 113.

44 CW 38:108.

something can become other, depending on which is defined as the something and hence which as the other. Thus, the concept of the something at all times also incorporates the concept of the other. This is the dialectic of the something and the other.

Marcuse views this as a key example of the deeply rooted character of Hegel's 'negative conception of reality',⁴⁵ since what is beyond a finite thing, its negative (the other), is actually what defines it. This is the first of a series of oppositions that are the subject matter and path of development of the *Science of Logic*. Marcuse writes that 'the "something" is hence a low level of development in the process that culminates in a free and conscious subject'.⁴⁶ In the dialectic of the something and the other Hegel gives even inanimate objects a rudimentary type of self-determination, but it is a very low level of what he will be developing through the course of the *Science of Logic*.

The discussion of the something and the other is very important because it also contains Hegel's first explicit reference to what was a key category for Marx, the negation of the negation. Hegel is trying to go beyond what he regards as Spinoza's 'making negation or nothing an ultimate'.⁴⁷ 'But in all this, care must be taken to distinguish between the *first* negation as negation in general, and the second negation, the negation of the negation: the latter is concrete, *absolute* negativity, just as the former on the contrary is only *abstract* negativity'.⁴⁸ This seems to suggest that negation of the negation is a self-developing process where thought moves from bare negation to the negation of that negation in the self-positing form of freedom. This is the passage that Lenin has skipped over, finding it obscure and abstruse.

Still within the chapter on determinate being, Lenin seizes on one of Hegel's numerous critiques of Kant's thing-in-itself, where Hegel writes, without referring explicitly to Kant, that things-in-themselves are ultimately 'truthless, empty abstractions'.⁴⁹ Lenin agrees heartily with Hegel's critique, calling it 'very profound'. He stresses especially that for Hegel, things-in-themselves are not, as for Kant, impenetrable and unknowable. They are also things-for-others, 'in relation to an Other, being transformed from one into the other'.⁵⁰

At this point in his notebook Lenin sketches out the first of many general summaries he will make of the concept of dialectics: 'Dialectics is the doctrine

45 Marcuse 1960, p. 132.

46 Marcuse 1960, p. 133.

47 *SL* 113.

48 *SL* 115–16.

49 *SL* 121.

50 *CW* 38:109.

of the *identity of opposites* – how they can be and how they become – under which conditions they become identical, transforming one into the other, – why the human mind must not take these opposites for dead, but for living, conditioned, mobile, transforming one into the other. In reading Hegel.⁵¹ Here Lenin has drawn out of Hegel's dialectic of the something and the other a concept that he terms transformation into opposite.⁵² It has some of the features of Hegel's negation of the negation, but it stops short of a vision of absolute negativity as a drive toward freedom.⁵³ Nonetheless, it *does* concretise many key features of what Hegel is doing, not only in this chapter, but in the entire *Science of Logic*. This concept of the transformation into opposite will become central, I will argue, to all of Lenin's post-1914 theorising. It is a category that Lenin would soon put to frequent use in his analyses of the collapse of the Second International and World War I and in most of his other theoretical writings. It also underlies his later conceptualisation of the changes in the structure of capitalism since Marx's death. Lenin's theorising of the transformation from competitive to monopoly capitalism, a crucial feature of his theory of imperialism, was connected to this concept drawn from Hegel. Similarly, his theory of a labour aristocracy was one of the transformation into opposite of a section of the working class. We will see this notion again and again in Chapters 4, 5, and 6, when I examine Lenin's published writings after 1914 in the light of his Hegel Notebooks.

Lenin continues to probe Hegel's text, now on the question of finitude. Hegel writes: 'When we say that things are finite, we understand thereby that ... non-being constitutes their nature and being'.⁵⁴ In other words, the something, in the course of determining its being, posits its other and discovers the limit of what it is. In Hegel even inanimate objects seem to move and develop, mapping out their limits against the point where their nonbeing begins. Instead of dismissing this as an idealistic abstraction, Lenin is intrigued with Hegel's dialectical presentation of finitude. In his abstract he writes at this point in his reading of Hegel's text:

51 CW 38:109.

52 Although Lenin does not refer to Marx here, his stress on transformation into opposite may have been connected to Marx's discussion, in Volume I of *Capital*, of the transformation of surplus value into capital. Marx argues there that, as capitalism develops, economic laws that seem to hold at the level of the market 'become changed into their direct opposite through their own internal and inexorable dialectic' (1976a: 729). For a recent discussion of this passage in Marx, see Geras 1989, pp. 211–67. [Geras not in references].

53 As we will see later, this culminates in the absolute idea chapter, where Hegel refers to a process of the negation of the negation whereby 'a subject, a person, a free being exists' (SL 836).

54 SL 129.

Acute and profound!⁵⁵ Hegel analyses concepts that usually appear dead, and he shows that there *is* movement in them. The finite? That means *movement* has come to an end! Something? – That means not what Other is. Being in general? – That means such indeterminateness that being = not-Being. All-sided universal flexibility of concepts – flexibility reaching to the identity of opposites. – That is the essence. This flexibility, applied subjectively = eclecticism and sophistry. Flexibility, applied objectively, i.e., reflecting the all-sidedness of the material process and its unity, is dialectics, is the correct reflection of the eternal development of the world.⁵⁶

Lenin is evidently impressed by the notion that Hegel describes even finitude in terms of movement, of self-development.

Next Hegel develops the much-discussed two types of infinity, spurious and affirmative. Spurious infinity is the infinity of ‘infinite progress’, which ‘remains burdened with the finite as such, is thereby limited and is itself finite’.⁵⁷ Affirmative infinity is based on a self-development from within the finite, transcending the finite through a process of negation: ‘Thus, both finite and infinite are this *movement* in which each returns to itself through its negation; they *are* only as *mediation* within themselves, and the affirmative of each contains the negative of each and is the negation of the negation’.⁵⁸ Lenin writes down fairly detailed excerpts from this discussion but makes few direct comments on the two types of infinity.

Marcuse argues that these passages in Hegel show the earthy rather than theological character of his concept of infinity: ‘Accordingly, Hegel contrasts his concept of infinity with the theological idea of it ... There are not two worlds, the finite and the infinite. There is only one world, in which finite things attain their self-determination through perishing. Their infinity is in this world and nowhere else’.⁵⁹ Affirmative infinity of this type is what Hegel calls ‘being-for-self’, a type of being that has gone beyond determinate being. Determinate being, writes Errol Harris, is really only ‘being for another’.⁶⁰ The chapter on being-for-self forms the third chapter of the first part of ‘The Doctrine of Being’.

55 Here is a good example of the advantages of the translation by Dunayevskaya, a Hegelian Marxist. In the Moscow translation this phrase is rendered instead as ‘shrewd and clever’. There is a great difference between cleverness and profundity, and the Moscow translators have bent their translation toward mere cleverness.

56 CW 38:110.

57 SL 142.

58 SL 147.

59 Marcuse 1960, p. 139.

60 Harris 1983, p. 110.

2.4 *'Being-for-Self' and Lenin's Critique of Vulgar Materialism*

In his notes on the chapter on being-for-self, Lenin complains of the obscurity of Hegel's text at several points, and his notes are not very detailed, but he soon shows the extent to which he is breaking new ground for himself in his reading of Hegel. This is seen in the way in which, in his discussion of being-for-self, he concludes that the ideal and the real are not absolute opposites, any more than were immediacy and mediation in the introductory sections of the *Science of Logic*. This is no small point, for it constitutes a major advance from the notion developed by Engels and Plekhanov, and followed by the whole Second International (including Lenin himself before 1914), of dividing philosophical perspectives rigidly into two camps, idealism and materialism. Therefore I will look at it in some detail.

First Lenin takes down the following passage from the middle of Hegel's chapter on being-for-self: 'The *ideality* of being-for-self as a totality thus passes over [*schlägt um*], in the first place, to *reality*, and that too in its most fixed, abstract form, as the *one*'.⁶¹ Then he makes the following statement, an apparent response to the single sentence just quoted: 'The idea of the transformation of the ideal into the real is *profound!* Very important for history. But also in the personal life of man it is evident that there is much truth in this. Against vulgar materialism. NB. The difference of the ideal from the material is also not unconditional, not boundless [*überschwenglich*]'.⁶² Although Lenin's remark is hardly an exposition of Hegel's category of being-for-self, it is a key statement of what he is developing for himself out of his reading of Hegel's text.

In a certain sense this is the turning point of the entire Hegel Notebooks, the point where Lenin begins to identify himself fairly openly with Hegel's idealism. This is very different from his pre-1914 view, wherein he had nevertheless defended Hegel's 'objective idealism' (in a far narrower sense) against other forms of idealism such as Kantianism, as did Engels and Plekhanov. Now it is a question not only of Hegel as merely the greatest idealist philosopher but also of using Hegel's idealism to critique narrow and crude forms of materialism. Most important in this is Lenin's recovery, in his appellation 'vulgar materialism', of Marx's critique of one-sided, non-dialectical, and contemplative forms of materialism, as seen in the first thesis on Feuerbach.

There is much more here, however. Lenin's comment points toward what will emerge by the end of the 'Abstract of Hegel's *Science of Logic*', a break in his own thought under the impact of Hegel. Only six years earlier, in *Materialism*

61 SL 164; translation altered.

62 CW 38:114.

and *Empirio-Criticism*, Lenin had developed a crude reflection theory, wherein ideas were seen as photocopies of matter. Now he writes that there is profundity in Hegel's concept of a move from the ideal to the real, which, unlike the reflection theory, gives a sort of ontological autonomy to ideas. Further, there is no longer an 'unconditional' or 'boundless' gap between idealism and materialism.

Although Lenin continues to read Hegel 'materialistically' in the broad sense of making connections to Marxism and to social and political theory generally, from now on he seems to have dropped, or at least nuanced, his earlier stipulation that in reading Hegel materialistically, he is throwing aside completely the idealist elements. Instead, he has begun to rediscover from his own study of Hegel elements in some ways similar to what the young Marx had developed as a concept of dialectic uniting the best sides of materialism and idealism. It is extremely important to note, however, that Lenin has managed to do so without having had access to Marx's 1844 *Manuscripts*, not published until 1927. He is beginning to move beyond Engelsian, Feuerbachian, and scientistic materialism to a grasp of the Hegelian-Marxian dialectic on a level far above that of the theorists of the Second International. We will see him apply, later on in his Hegel Notebooks, the epithet 'vulgar materialism' explicitly to Plekhanov's writings on dialectics and implicitly to his own pre-1914 writings as well.

2.5 *Magnitude, Measure, and Lenin's Concept of 'Leaps'*

As with many other Marxist and non-Marxist discussions of the *Science of Logic*, including Marcuse's, Lenin goes extremely lightly over the next 200 pages of Hegel's text, which constitute Sections 2 and 3 of 'The Doctrine of Being', 'Magnitude' (Quantity) and 'Measure', dealing with quantitative aspects of being. These sections include Hegel's critique of modern mathematics. Findlay writes that in this long discussion Hegel 'indulges in a certain amount of denigration of mathematics, which has reacted on his own reputation'.⁶³ Lenin devotes only ten pages of his abstract to this vast section, most of it summary without comment, and those notes focus mainly on Hegel's critique of the concept of gradualness. Lenin does at several points seem to express a basic agreement with Hegel's critique of mathematical reason. He also notes one of Hegel's references to subjectivity: 'Interesting is Hegel's remark made in passing – "transcendentally, that is really subjective and psychological" ... "transcendental, that is the subject"'.⁶⁴ If he agrees with Findlay and others who

63 Findlay 1958, p. 170.

64 *cw* 38:118.

separate themselves from Hegel's attack on modern mathematical reasoning, he does not indicate it. Dunayevskaya, who, unlike Findlay, ties Hegel's analysis here to a more general critique of empirical and scientistic thought, argues that 'Lenin, who did know a great deal about calculus, makes very short shrift of this whole section precisely because he agrees with Hegel'.⁶⁵ Lenin finds this material difficult, lamenting at one point: 'Further the transition of quantity into quality in the abstract-theoretical exposition is so obscure that nothing can be understood. Return to it!'.⁶⁶

Findlay notes that one of the last parts of this material on quantification and mathematics, 'Nodal Line of Measure Relations', has been discussed by Marxists. He is probably referring to Engels's *Anti-Dühring*, where the boiling and freezing points of water are described, following Hegel, as 'nodes', where 'quantity becomes transformed into quality'. Findlay summarises Hegel's point thus: 'Qualities in things rest on a basis of Measures which persist through a long stretch of quantitative variation. Then, of a sudden, variation, from being merely quantitative, becomes momentous and qualitative: we pass a node, there is a transition into another sort of qualitative being ... Both morals and politics show a similar heaping up of quantitative changes which precipitate changes which are qualitative, a doctrine widely appealed to by Marxist philosophers'.⁶⁷ Here, as Hegel concludes 'The Doctrine of Being', Lenin suddenly finds something that illuminates a key problem for him as a Marxist: Hegel's assertion, as Lenin puts it, 'that gradualness explains nothing without leaps'.⁶⁸

Here is part of a passage from Hegel on leaps that Lenin copies down excitedly, writing next to it in the margin of his notebook: 'Leaps! Breaks in gradualness! Leaps! Leaps!'.⁶⁹ Hegel himself has written: 'It is said, *natura non facit saltum* [nature makes no leaps]; and ordinary thinking when it has to grasp a coming-to-be or a ceasing-to-be, fancies it has done so by representing it as a *gradual* emergence or disappearance. ... Water, in cooling, does not gradually harden as if it thickened like porridge, gradually solidifying until it reached the consistency of ice; it suddenly solidifies, all at once'.⁷⁰ In appropriating this passage from Hegel as his own, Lenin seems to separate himself

65 Dunayevskaya, 'Rough Notes on Hegel's *Science of Logic*', in Dunayevskaya 1981–9, p. 2822.

66 *CW* 38:117.

67 Findlay 1958, p. 180.

68 *CW* 38:123.

69 *CW* 38:123.

70 *SL* 370.

a bit from Plekhanov's more evolutionist interpretation.⁷¹ In Lenin's reading of Hegel, the stress is on breaks, leaps, and discontinuities rather than on evolutionary historical stages. As I mentioned in Chapter 1, with Plekhanov it was the opposite: evolution was the major theme, and leaps were referred to only occasionally.

There is, however, nothing in Lenin's argument here that would take him very far beyond the similar arguments that Engels makes in *Anti-Dühring*. Engels's arguments on leaps in that work are based on the very same passages in the *Science of Logic* on ice, water, and steam. For Engels, these examples from inanimate nature tend to be equated with the dialectical perspective as a whole, at least in philosophy. Lenin's 'Abstract of Hegel's *Science of Logic*' shows a broader interest in the whole of Hegel's work than do the writings of Engels on Marxist dialectics. This will be seen as Lenin moves further into Hegel's texts.

Before moving to the second book of the *Science of Logic*, 'The Doctrine of Essence', let us look at where Lenin has gone up to now. First, we have seen him single out both immediacy and mediation. Second, he has begun to appreciate the importance of subjectivity as well as objectivity. Third, we have seen him begin to discuss in this section an important category for him in Hegel's *Science of Logic*, the transformation into opposite. Fourth, he has skipped over Hegel's introduction of a key concept, the negation of the negation. Fifth, he has begun to develop an affinity for idealism. He has also sketched out a critique of 'vulgar materialism', introducing that term into twentieth-century Marxism. Sixth, he has stressed the category of leaps or breaks in gradualness. Let us keep all this in mind as I now turn to the discussion of 'The Doctrine of Essence', which many Marxists, including Engels, have viewed as the core of Hegel's *Science of Logic*.

3 On 'The Doctrine of Essence'

Book 2 of Hegel's *Science of Logic*, 'The Doctrine of Essence', comprises 180 pages, to which Lenin devotes 35 pages of notes. Lenin begins his notes by returning to the problem of illusory being, also renderable in English as show, mere appearance, seeming, or semblance; all these terms are possible translations of the German word *Schein*, which is the title of the first chapter in 'The Doctrine of Essence'. I will refer to it as illusory being, in keeping with the

71 C.L.R. James gives great emphasis to Lenin's development here of the category of leaps. For a discussion, see Chapter 7.

Miller English translation.⁷² One problem in terminology is that Hegel has a later section in 'The Doctrine of Essence' entitled 'Appearance' [*Erscheinung*], where appearance is by then presented somewhat more as the manifestation of essence. The issue of illusory being was also touched on by Hegel in the introduction to the *Science of Logic* and, as we have seen, already taken up by Lenin then.

3.1 *Illusory Being and Lenin's Critique of Reductionism and Essentialism*

In the chapter on illusory being one of Hegel's concerns is to refute both generalised notions of scepticism and the Kantian concept of an unknowable thing-in-itself. To Hegel, even illusory being is to some degree an expression of the essence of an object or phenomenon in the sense of specifying what it is not. Lenin compares Hegel's concept of essence to 'the movement of a river – the foam above and the deep currents below'. He continues: '*But even the foam* is an expression of essence'.⁷³ Lenin identifies strongly with Hegel's critique of scepticism here. In tending to regard all being as illusory, Hegel writes, scepticism 'did not permit itself to say what "it" is'.⁷⁴ But Lenin also identifies with Hegel when the latter critiques 'the various forms of idealism – Leibnizian, Kantian, Fichtean, and others' – that in Hegel's view tend to deny any deeper foundation beneath illusory being. As Hegel puts it: 'modern idealism did not permit itself to regard knowledge as a knowing of the thing-in-itself'. Although it was an advance over mere scepticism, Hegel concludes that this type of idealism gave over to illusory being all content, 'the manifold wealth of the world', since it did not probe deeply enough beneath the surface of reality.⁷⁵ Lenin takes down most of Hegel's critique and then writes: 'You include in illusory being all the wealth of the world and you deny the objectivity of illusory being'.⁷⁶ Here, once again, Lenin identifies with Hegel's critique of Kant.

Lenin continues to work his way through the chapter on illusory being, now delving into the category of reflection, which Hegel describes as illusory being withdrawn into itself and 'alienated [*entfremdeten*] from its immediacy'.⁷⁷ Lenin takes down Hegel's statement: 'Consequently, becoming is essence, its reflective movement, *is the movement of nothing to nothing, and so*

72 For a discussion of some of the problems in translation and a creative contemporary analysis of this chapter, see Dahlstrom 1990, pp. 99–112.

73 *CW* 38:130.

74 *SL* 396.

75 *Ibid.*

76 *CW* 38:131.

77 *SL* 399.

back to itself'.⁷⁸ Lenin has a twofold reaction to this statement: 'This is acute and profound. Movements "to nothing" occur in nature and in life. Only there are certainly none "from nothing". Always from something'.⁷⁹ Here Lenin seems to misconstrue the circularity of Hegel's concept of negation, which can be seen in the triad being-nothing-becoming that began the *Science of Logic* and where the presence of nothing alongside being helped to drive cognition toward becoming. Here, in the chapter on illusory being, Hegel gives an example of what he means a bit further on in the same passage when he writes of 'the nothingness of a nothing', which, 'as the negation of a nothing, constitutes being'.⁸⁰ Much of this seems to elude Lenin.

But Lenin *has* caught Hegel's sharp critique of essentialism. As Pippin notes in his discussion of this passage: 'Indeed, contrary to many popular interpretations of Hegel (the ones with world spirit behind the scenes, pulling the historical strings), it appears that the major point of this section is to argue that there is literally nothing "beyond" or "behind" or responsible for the human experience of the world of appearances, and certainly not an Absolute Spirit'.⁸¹ A bit later on Lenin adds to his abstract yet another endorsement of Hegel's critique of Kant, this time for Kant's failure to grasp the objectivity of illusory being: 'Thus here also Hegel accuses Kant of *subjectivism*. This *NB*. Hegel is for the "objective validity" (sit venia verbo [if it may be called that]) of illusory being, "of the immediate given" (the term, given, is common with Hegel in general.) The little philosophers dispute whether one should take as basis essence or the immediately given. (Kant, Hume, all Machists). Hegel substitutes 'and' for 'or', and explains the concrete content of this "and"'.⁸² Lenin thus identifies with Hegel's critique of both essentialism and nominalism. Although Lenin does not state it explicitly here, he may be concerned not only with Kant and other philosophers but also with established Marxist theory, which had emphasised that politics and ideology are mere 'superstructure', whereas economics is the 'base' and therefore the real foundation for a Marxist analysis. This type of economic reductionism had been prominent in European Marxism at least since the last years of Engels.

78 SL 400.

79 CW 38:133.

80 SL 400.

81 Pippin 1989, p. 206.

82 CW 38:134.

3.2 *Identity, Difference, and Contradiction and Lenin on Self-Movement*

The next chapter, 'The Essentialities or Determinations of Reflection', is especially important to Lenin because it deals with the key dialectical categories of identity, difference, and contradiction. Lenin summarises and appears to agree with Hegel's critique of the Aristotelian laws of identity and noncontradiction, whereby because A is A, it cannot at the same time be not-A. In his notes Lenin writes: 'Therefore Hegel elucidates the one-sidedness, the incorrectness, of the "law of Identity" ($A = A$).'⁸³ For Hegel, identity leads not to harmony but to difference. As Max Horkheimer of the Frankfurt School once put it: 'According to Hegel, in identity the differences are not merely negated, rather they must be 'sublated' [*aufgehoben*] in the double meaning of the word. Identity comes to be thought of as the conceptual unity of the contradictions.'⁸⁴

Once Lenin gets into the key and often-discussed section on contradiction, he writes: 'This is acute and correct. Every concrete thing, every concrete something, stands in multifarious and often contradictory relations to everything else, ergo it is itself and some other'.⁸⁵ Lenin now makes Hegel's law of contradiction and his concept of self-movement [*Selbstbewegung*] – or more generally, his dialectic – the key not only to Hegel but also to Marxism. First he writes down five full paragraphs from Hegel's brief section on the law of contradiction. The extract includes the following material:

But it is one of the fundamental prejudices of logic as hitherto understood and of ordinary thinking, that contradiction is not so characteristically essential and immanent a determination as identity; but in fact, if it were a question of grading the two determinations and they had to be kept separate, then contradiction would have to be taken as the profounder determination and more characteristic of essence. For as against contradiction, identity is merely the determination of the simple immediate, of dead being; but contradiction is the root of all movement and vitality; it is only in so far as something has contradiction within it that it moves, has an urge and activity ... Further, it is not to be taken merely as an abnormality which only occurs here and there, but is rather the negative as determined in the sphere of essence, the principle of all self-movement, which consists solely in an exhibition of it.⁸⁶

83 *CW* 38:134–5.

84 Horkheimer 1987, p. 297.

85 *CW* 38:138.

86 *SL* 439–40.

Here we are a long way not only from crude materialism but also from any notion of dialectic as merely fluid rather than static. The key has become self-movement and not merely movement. And this self-movement arises from within the subject matter. Thus it is not a steady ‘flow’ or the product of external force; instead, it arises from the inner contradictions of the subject matter that constitute the heart of dialectical development and change. Putting it in terms of social theory, the internal contradictions of a given society are the key to grasping changes within that society, changes that develop as a process of self-development and self-movement.

Lenin becomes very enthusiastic over having discovered this, not in Marx, but directly in Hegel: ‘Movement and “self-movement” (this *NB!* arbitrary (independent) spontaneous, *internally-necessary* movement) “change”, “movement and life”, “the principle of every self-movement”, “impulse” (*Trieb*) to “movement” and “activity” – opposite of “dead being”. – Who would believe that this is the core of “Hegelianism”, of abstract and abstruse (difficult, absurd?) Hegelianism??’.⁸⁷ Thus, movement and self-movement have their basis in the internal contradictions of things and social phenomena. In his view of this movement as at the same time spontaneous and internally necessary, Lenin is rejecting the crudely deterministic models of the Marxism of the Second International while at the same time identifying with Hegel’s notion of a historically and socially grounded concept of subjectivity.⁸⁸ This concept of self-movement through contradiction, not identity or ‘dead being’, is for Lenin the core of Hegel’s *Science of Logic*, something that he is evidently surprised to discover.

This does not mean that Hegel alone has developed the revolutionary dialectic, however. Not only Marx but also Engels is still needed. Lenin continues: ‘It is necessary to reveal, to understand, to save, release, purify this kernel – which is precisely what Marx and Engels did. The idea of universal movement and change (1813, *Logic*) was captured before its application to life and society. It was proclaimed in reference to society (1847) earlier than in relation to man (1859)’.⁸⁹ Thus, at the end of these remarks on contradiction he does refer to Engels as well as Marx and to ‘universal movement and change’ and not ‘self-movement’ through contradiction. The reference to the year 1847 is apparently to the *Communist Manifesto*; the one to 1859, to Charles Darwin’s *Origin*

87 *CW* 38:141.

88 Colletti has attacked Lenin’s treatment of the concept of self-movement here in his discussion of Hegel on contradiction, accusing him of having ignored the religious underpinnings of Hegel’s central argument. For a discussion, see Chapter 8.

89 *CW* 38:141.

of Species. Thus, at this point Lenin excludes from his new concept of dialectic neither Engels in general nor Engels's fascination with Darwinian evolution. Nonetheless, the first of the previously cited passages, the one that takes up self-movement, suggests that Lenin is reaching beyond Engels and notions of mere fluidity as the core of the dialectic to notions that Engels did not stress: contradiction and especially self-movement.

Dunayevskaya argues that the significance of the preceding passage in Lenin's abstract lies in his new appreciation of idealism: 'From now on, Lenin shows the highest appreciation of the idealism in dialectical philosophy. Thought has its own dialectic and what is crucial here is that Lenin is not merely saying: Let's read Hegel materialistically ... By now he has taken that for granted philosophically as well as in life, and, instead stresses that the *idea* of universal movement came first with Hegel, then in Marx, and finally with Darwin'.⁹⁰ Lenin has thus moved further into a critical but direct appropriation of key categories from Hegel's work, which is taking him beyond his previous concept of dialectic.

Now Lenin shows still more how far he has come. We see that from the way in which he sums up what he has taken from Hegel's concept of contradiction:

- (1) Ordinary perception grasps the difference and the contradiction, but not *the transition* from the one to the other, *but this is the most important*.
- (2) Intelligent reflection and understanding. Reflection grasps the contradiction, *expresses* it, brings things into relation to one another, allows the 'concept to show through the contradiction', but does not express the concept of things and their relation.
- (3) Thinking reason (mind) [*denkende Vernunft*] sharpens the blunt difference of variety, the mere manifold of imagination, to the *essential* difference, into *Opposition*. Only when the contradictions reach the peak do the manifold entities become active (*regsam*)⁹¹ and lively in relation to one another, – they acquire that negativity which is the *inner pulsation of self-movement and vitality*.⁹²

90 Dunayevskaya 1967, p. 3894.

91 The German word *regsam* (active), which Lenin places in parentheses, also carries the meaning of 'mentally alert'. Especially here, but also in some other places, Lenin's notes, which were after all not intended for publication, are cryptic and unclear. I quote them in their sometimes rough and ungrammatical form rather than risk distortion by attempting to edit them for greater clarity.

92 *CW* 38:143.

What is new here is the relationship Lenin sees between what intuitively appear to be total opposites: on one hand, spontaneous self-movement, and on the other, 'thinking reason'. Contradiction is not only in lifeless forces but, most importantly, in the life and interactions of human beings, who possess thinking reason.

There is a lot of mention here by Lenin of thinking reason and of self-movement and vitality. His post-1914 concept of philosophy and social theory is, I will argue later, more nuanced, more open to spontaneity, self-movement, and creativity from below. That is arguably the type of change that Lenin's Marxism is being shown to undergo in these Hegel Notebooks.

3.3 *Ground, 'Form and Content', and Lenin's Attack on 'God and the Absolute'*

Next comes Hegel's chapter entitled 'Ground', which includes an important discussion of form in relation to essence, to matter, and, most importantly, to content. As he did earlier with illusory being [*Schein*] and essence, Hegel in this chapter opposes any reduction of form to essence, matter, or content. As to form and essence, Hegel writes: 'Form has essence in its own identity, just as essence has in its negative nature absolute form. The question cannot therefore be asked, how form is added to essence, for it is only the reflection of essence into essence itself [*das Scheinen desselben in sich selbst*], essence's own immanent reflection'.⁹³ Thus, neither form nor essence determines its counterpart; rather, they are dialectically interrelated. Lenin records some of the passage just quoted and then writes in his abstract: 'Form is essential. Essence is formed. In one way or another also in dependence on Essence'.⁹⁴ Lenin does not do very much with the discussion of form and content, but it is there that Hegel demolishes the common notion that content is more important than form.

From this point on Hegel moves into more critiques of the standpoint of natural science and what he considers to be its one-sided concept of ground. Hegel mocks what he considers to be the tautological basis of statements such as that nature is the ground of the world. Lenin summarises this material briefly but seems to be put off a bit by this critique of science and even nature as the ground of the world. Lenin writes the following summary of the whole discussion of ground, where he expresses some reservations about Hegel's idealism but nonetheless seems to endorse his overall argument:

93 SL 449–50.

94 CW 38:144.

If I'm not mistaken, there is much mysticism and empty pedantry here in the conclusions of Hegel. But the basic idea is one of genius: all-world, all-sided, living connection of everything with everything and of the reflection of this connection – standing Hegel materialistically on his head – in the concept of man, which must be so polished, broken-in, flexible, mobile, relative, mutually connected, unified in opposition, as to embrace the world. The continuation of the work of Hegel and Marx must consist in the *dialectical* elaboration of the history of human thought, science, and technology.⁹⁵

Here, on the one hand, Lenin wants to separate himself from Hegel's 'mysticism' and to 'invert' him materialistically. On the other hand, he identifies strongly with Hegel's concept of living totality, the 'connection of everything with everything else'. He refers to the 'work of Hegel and Marx', an expression quite unusual for the Marxism of 1914. In the margin, next to this summary, he alludes to methodological similarities between Hegel and Marx: 'And a purely logical working out? It coincides. It must coincide as do induction and deduction in *Capital*.'⁹⁶

Some of this sense of identity as well as difference that Lenin himself evidently feels toward Hegel is shown even more forcefully when he continues his summary of Hegel's concept of interconnection: 'A river and the *drops* in this river. The position of every drop, its relation to the others; the direction of its movement ... Concepts, as *registration* of individual aspects of the movement, of individual drops (= 'things'), of individual "*streams*", etc. There you have the picture of the world according to Hegel's *Logic*, – of course minus God and the Absolute'.⁹⁷ Thus, despite some remarks to the contrary quoted earlier, Lenin has not given up either his opposition to idealism or his intention to read Hegel materialistically. As we have seen, however, when he gets caught up in Hegel's text, he sometimes contradicts this intention, bringing in many idealistic elements and on occasion writing of a needed unity between idealism and materialism. Since these are only notebooks, and not a finished work, they show the process of Lenin's contradictory thoughts as he grapples with these issues in the autumn of 1914.

In his abstract Lenin continues his expressions of both identity and difference with Hegel as he comes to the end of the chapter on ground. He quotes approvingly Hegel's statement: '*When all the conditions of a fact are present,*

95 CW 38:146–7.

96 CW 38:146.

97 CW 38:147.

it enters into existence'.⁹⁸ Then he makes the following brief comment: 'Very good! What has the Absolute Idea and idealism to do with it? Amusing, this "derivation" of ... *existence*'.⁹⁹ This appears to be a reaction against what Lenin perceives as an ultra-idealistic statement in Hegel's passage. He does not quote the following sentence, however: 'The fact *is, before it exists*, it is, first, as *essence* or as an *unconditioned*; secondly, it has *determinate being* or is determinate, and this in the twofold manner above considered, on the one hand, in its conditions, and on the other, in its ground'.¹⁰⁰ It is possibly this further statement by Hegel that sets off Lenin's dismissal and ridicule. Dunayevskaya sees this passage quite differently, however, and argues that what Hegel means by conditions of a fact is 'history itself'.¹⁰¹ To Hegel empirical facts are conditioned by history and emergent in a process of self-movement of various social forces and groups. Facts are not lifeless and motionless but rather go through a process of becoming, existence, and then nonexistence. It is the whole process and not the fact at an isolated point in time that is the key to a broader understanding. Later Lenin will concede that cognition shapes the world and thus does create 'facts', but here he is still reacting strongly against Hegel's idealism.

3.4 *Existence*

The second section of 'The Doctrine of Essence' is entitled 'Appearance', and here Lenin's notes are a bit more compressed than in the earlier section, from which the majority of his notes on essence are drawn. This is in keeping with Hegel's own more compressed presentation of these issues. After summarising Hegel's brief overview, where Hegel stresses once again that essence 'must appear',¹⁰² Lenin turns to the first chapter of this section, 'Existence'. Marcuse sums up Hegel's transition from ground to existence thus: 'The ground of a thing, for Hegel, is nothing other than the totality of its essence, materialised in the concrete conditions and circumstances of existence. The essence is thus as much historical as ontological. The essential potentialities of things realise themselves in the same comprehensive process that establishes their existence'.¹⁰³ Whereas Marcuse sees historical aspects of Hegel's argument in this chapter, however, Lenin is at first put off by Hegel's references on the first page

98 SL 477.

99 CW 38:147; ellipsis in original.

100 SL 477.

101 'Notes on a Series of Lectures', in Dunayevskaya 1981–9, p. 3895.

102 SL 478.

103 Marcuse 1960, p. 149.

of his discussion to 'proofs of the existence of God'.¹⁰⁴ Lenin writes: 'And again ... on the existence of God!! This wretched God, as soon as the word existence is mentioned, he takes offense'.¹⁰⁵

What is more surprising is the fact that this dismissal of Hegel's mention and then sharp critique of the ontological proof for the existence of God does not stop Lenin from recording the non-religious core of Hegel's concept of existence at this point in his abstract: 'Existence differs from Being by its mediation. [?By concreteness and Connection?].'¹⁰⁶ By this time, even when we get to a text on the existence of God, Lenin does not dismiss it completely but tries to develop something out of it for Marxist dialectics. Leaving aside God and the absolute, at least in this passage, does not mean skipping over key arguments in Hegel's text simply because they are developed out of a discussion of religion. Lenin evidently finds himself on more familiar ground in the next parts of this chapter, much of which consists once again of critiques of Kant's thing-in-itself, from which he takes down some fairly lengthy extracts in his abstract. In the middle of these extracts he writes in the margin of his abstract: 'the core = against subjectivism and the split between the thing-in-itself and appearances'.¹⁰⁷

3.5 *Appearance and Lenin's Critique of the Laws of Formal Logic and Natural Science*

'Appearance' is the title not only of this entire section within 'The Doctrine of Essence' but also of its second chapter. Here appearance [*Erscheinung*] is not only a (false) reflection of reality, as was illusory being [*Schein*], but also, Hegel writes, something more fundamental. Appearance is the manifestation of essence. To illustrate his point he argues that, for example, in some forms of Indian philosophy appearance is irrelevant and that there is no real connection between essence and appearance: 'Appearance is at first essence in its Existence ... But if it is said that something is *only* Appearance, in the sense that contrasted with it *immediate Existence* is the truth, then the fact is that Appearance is the higher truth ... It is when Existence passes over into Appearance that it ceases to be essenceless ... Appearance is accordingly the unity of illusory being and Existence'.¹⁰⁸ Lenin takes down some of this in his abstract

104 SL 481.

105 CW 38:148.

106 CW 38:148.

107 CW 38:150.

108 SL 499–500.

and then begins to read Hegel's discussion of the 'law of appearance', which he finds difficult going, writing: 'Here in general utter obscurity'.¹⁰⁹

Findlay writes that in these passages Hegel is developing laws of appearance that 'do not lie beyond' appearances 'but are present in them', laws that Hegel seeks to make 'more and more extended so as to cover every detail', up to and including 'the whole content of whatever exists or might have existed in the whole universe', whereupon 'it will no longer be possible to differentiate the two worlds' of appearance and actual content.¹¹⁰ At the same time, Hegel in this discussion says that such an 'essential unity has not yet emerged in the law',¹¹¹ and he concludes that although law is 'essential form', it is 'not as yet real form which is reflected into its sides as content'.¹¹²

Despite his complaint about Hegel's obscurity, Lenin evidently catches some of this, writing in his abstract: 'But there is a vital thought, evidently: the concept of *law* is *one* of the stages of cognition by man of *unity* and *connection*, of the reciprocal dependence and totality of the world process. The "treatment" and "twisting" of words and concepts to which Hegel devotes himself here is a struggle against making the concept of *law* absolute, against simplifying it, against making a fetish of it *NB* for modern physics'.¹¹³ Here Lenin seems to agree with Hegel's development of the concept of law, one that attempts to unite content and appearance, as against the more external type of law, which, argues Hegel, is used in natural science and formal logic.

Lenin takes down the following sentence from Hegel's text: 'Accordingly, law is not beyond Appearance but is immediately present in it; the realm of Laws is the motionless reflection [*ruhige Abbild*] of the world of Existence or Appearance'.¹¹⁴ Lenin then writes: 'This is remarkably materialistic and remarkably pointed (in a word, 'motionless') determination. Law takes the motionless – and therefore law, every law, is narrow, incomplete, an approximation'.¹¹⁵ Once again, there is an implicit critique of the type of laws found in formal logic and natural science, and it is certainly possible that Lenin intends this critique also to apply to the scientific and formalised Marxism of the Second International. This is only an inference, however, since there is no textual evidence in these pages of the abstract linking the critique of law to Marxist theory. Lenin sums

109 CW 38:150.

110 Findlay 1958, pp. 206–7.

111 SL 504.

112 SL 505.

113 CW 38:150–51.

114 SL 503; translation altered.

115 CW 38:151.

up Hegel's discussion of appearance thus: 'The essence is that both the World of Appearance and the world which is in itself are essentially *moments* of man's knowledge of nature, steps, *changes* in (or deepening of) knowledge. The shifting of the world further and further *from* the world of appearance – that is what is not yet visible in Hegel. *NB.* Do not the "moments" of the Notion with Hegel have the significance of "moments" of transition?'¹¹⁶ In this comment Lenin seems to support much of Hegel's critique of law of appearance but at the same time to express some reservation toward the extremely close identity that Hegel has created between his concepts of appearance and essence.

3.6 *The Essential Relation: The Whole and the Parts*

The third chapter of the section on appearance is entitled 'Essential Relation', and one of the key discussions here is on the whole and the parts. Dunayevskaya regards this discussion of a mediated relation between the whole and the parts as a very important one for Marxist theory: 'The relationship of the Whole and the Parts ... has been to me a key, not merely to this section of Hegel, but to the entire philosophy of both Hegel and Marx. Thus, when I say that the whole is not only the sum total of the parts, but has a pull on the parts that are not yet there, even as the future has a pull on the present, it is obvious that we have moved from abstract philosophic conceptions to the actual world, and from the actual world back again to philosophy, but this time as enriched by the actual'.¹¹⁷ This is not really Lenin's focus as he reads this chapter, however. He seems dubious of the very concept of moving from the whole to the parts.

Lenin summarises some of Hegel's text but then attacks one of the transitions, where Hegel writes that the contradiction between the whole and the parts has resolved itself into 'Force [*Kraft*] and its expression [*Äusserung*]', which is their truth.¹¹⁸ This transition is a difficult one, and it has also perplexed many Hegel scholars. Apparently exasperated by Hegel's obscurity, Lenin suddenly agrees in part with the British positivist Karl Pearson's attack on many of Hegel's transitions in the *Science of Logic* as nonsensical: 'This is one of 1,000 similar passages in Hegel, which arouse the fury of naive philosophers like Pearson, the author of *The Grammar of Science*. He ... exclaims in fury: what galimatias is being taught in our schools!! And in a *certain limited* sense he is right. To teach *that* is stupid. One must first of all *extract* the materialist dialectics from it. Nine-tenths of it, however, is chaff, rubbish'.¹¹⁹ Althusser has focused on the

116 CW 38:153.

117 Dunayevskaya, 'Rough Notes on Hegel's *Science of Logic*', in Dunayevskaya 1981–9, p. 2826.

118 SL 517.

119 CW 38:154.

last part of this passage to argue that Lenin is rejecting nine-tenths of the *Science of Logic*. Such an interpretation seems excessive to me.¹²⁰ In this comment Lenin could alternatively be read as suggesting that in these types of passages in Hegel's text, but only in them, nine-tenths should be thrown aside. Otherwise, the fact of his extensive notes on the *Science of Logic* makes little sense.

There is also the interesting question of whether Lenin is in his entire abstract really following the occasional references he makes to throwing aside the 'idealist' elements in Hegel. Did he write that he was rejecting Hegel's idealism to reassure himself from time to time that he was not falling overboard in reading Hegel? We cannot know. Rejecting Hegel's idealism *in toto* may have been his intention, but we have seen and will see many key passages where Hegel's text is unmistakably idealistic, and yet Lenin manages to 'extract' quite a bit from them. His study of Hegel thus seems to have gotten away from him, or at least from some of his intentions. But such is the case in many major intellectual projects, where the work seemingly takes on a life of its own, getting away from its author, and Lenin's study of Hegel was no quick review but a major, months-long effort. By the end of his abstract we will see him conclude that most of Hegel's *Science of Logic* is in fact materialistic. These 'contradictions' in Lenin's abstract cannot be fully resolved, since he never wrote up the material as a finished work, and it is therefore full of the inconsistencies and false starts of an actual grappling with Hegel as part of his own rethinking of Marxist dialectics.

3.7 *Actuality: The Absolute as a Closed Totality*

Under the topic of 'Actuality', the last part of 'The Doctrine of Essence', the distinction between appearance and essence collapses into a new unity, which Hegel terms actuality. Hegel here moves beyond the one-sided view of common sense that the immediate external world is the sole reality while equally opposing the essentialist and mystical arguments to the effect that the external world is unreal and that essence is the true reality. For Hegel, essence must actually appear, and it appears in a unity of essence and appearance as actuality. In the category of actuality, essence more fully manifests itself. A great number of issues are addressed under the theme of actuality, but the key question for Lenin is Hegel's discussion of necessity and causality.

Lenin more or less skips over the beginning chapter of this section, 'The Absolute', taking issue with Hegel's expression that in 'the absolute itself is no

120 For a synopsis and critique of Althusser on these and other passages, see Chapter 8.

becoming'.¹²¹ After taking down this passage, Lenin writes 'nonsense about the Absolute'.¹²² At this stage the absolute is for Hegel one of 'absolute identity' where 'the absolute does not determine itself' and thus sounds very much like the type of closure that Engels and other Marxists claim to be at the root of the dogmatic character of Hegel's absolute. This passage is only one of several treatments of the absolute in the *Science of Logic*, however, and I will argue that in the later stages, especially in material on the absolute idea, Hegel's absolute does show a process of becoming and self-determination. Nonetheless, the absolute seems to be more like oppositionless closure at this relatively early stage of the development of Hegel's argument.

At this stage the type of absolute that Hegel is discussing is really in the form of Spinoza's absolute substance, an absolute into which all distinction has vanished: 'Spinozism is a defective philosophy because in it reflection and its manifold determining is an *external thinking*. The substance of this system is *one* substance, one indivisible totality; there is no determinateness that is not contained and dissolved in this absolute ... Spinoza stops short at *negation* as *determinateness* or quality; he does not advance to a cognition of negation as absolute, that is, *self-negating, negation* ... [For Spinoza] substance lacks the principle of *personality*'.¹²³ Thus, Hegel is himself critiquing the position that Lenin seems to ascribe to him, one of an undifferentiated absolute substance.¹²⁴ Lenin does not appear to follow Hegel's argument very well, however, and he writes in his abstract that 'Hegel speaks (all too obscurely) of the defects of the philosophy of Spinoza and Leibniz'.¹²⁵ The central issue here is that this absolute at the end of 'The Doctrine of Essence' is closed, fixed, an absolute substance. Several hundred pages later, the third and final book of the *Science of Logic*, 'The Doctrine of the Notion', which Hegel also terms the 'Subjective Logic', also ends with an absolute, the absolute idea. But there, as we will see, absolute subjectivity rather than absolute substance is the key, giving the reader a greater sense of openness.

3.8 *Actuality: Cause and Effect*

Next, Lenin addresses Hegel's discussion of possibility and necessity in relation to actuality. From now on in his abstract Lenin begins referring to Hegel's shorter *Encyclopedia Logic* alongside the *Science of Logic*, and his notes will con-

121 SL 531.

122 CW 38:156.

123 SL 536–37.

124 See Findlay 1958, pp. 211–12, for a clear explication of this issue.

125 CW 38:156.

tain extracts from both texts. On the issue of possibility and necessity, Lenin writes that ‘in the small *Logic* (the *Encyclopedia*) the same thing is expounded very often more clearly, with more examples.’¹²⁶ This will become important in his notes on the idea of the good in ‘The Doctrine of the Notion’, where, I will argue, his use of the *Encyclopedia Logic* will lead him to miss some key issues in the *Science of Logic*. Lenin takes down some extracts from Hegel’s discussion of possibility and actuality, but he does not draw out any connections to Marxist dialectics or even really comment on it.¹²⁷

He does quite a bit more with the last chapter in ‘The Doctrine of Essence’, ‘The Absolute Relation’, which includes one of Hegel’s discussions of the dialectic of cause and effect. This has obvious relevance to Marxist theory for Lenin, since great debates were then taking place over the causes of war and imperialism. Hegel sees cause and effect not so much as separate categories but rather as part of an interconnected relationship of events and factors. Later Hegel will show us that what moves history, in his view, is not so much causality as the ‘free self-movement’ of the subject. At this point, however, Hegel concentrates on tearing apart earlier philosophical concepts of causality. A sense of this is given in this chapter when Hegel writes that the concept of cause and effect should not be applied to ‘*physico-organic* and *mental* [*geistigen*] *life*’,¹²⁸ since a cause ‘which acts on a living being is independently determined, and transmuted by it’.¹²⁹ ‘Thus it is inadmissible to say that food is the *cause* of blood, or certain dishes or chill and damp are the *causes* of fever, and so on; it is equally inadmissible to assign the ionic climate as the *cause* of Homer’s works, or Caesar’s ambition as the *cause* of the downfall of the republican constitution of Rome. In history generally, mental or spiritual entities [*geistige Massen*] and individuals are in play and reciprocal determination with each other’.¹³⁰ This higher level of what is usually termed causality, Hegel concludes, can be treated adequately only at a later stage of the *Science of Logic* that deals with the idea, by which time a freely developing self-consciousness has been articulated.

Lenin applauds Hegel at every stage in this critique of the concept of causality. After quoting Hegel’s statement that ‘Effect contains nothing whatever

126 *CW* 38:157.

127 Marcuse argues for strong affinities between Hegel’s discussion here and the Marxist concept of social change. The key link, he writes, is to ‘Hegel’s concept of real possibility, set forth as a concrete historical tendency and force’. See Marcuse 1960, p. 151.

128 *SL* 562.

129 *Ibid.*

130 *Ibid.*

that cause does not contain',¹³¹ he writes: 'Cause and Effect, ergo, are merely moments of universal reciprocal dependence, of (universal) connection, of the reciprocal concatenation of events, merely links in the chain of the development of matter ... the all-sidedness and all-embracing character of the interconnection of the world, which is only one-sidedly, fragmentarily and incompletely expressed by causality'.¹³² Lenin not only shares Hegel's concept of a reciprocity between cause and effect but uses it to criticise 'neo-empiricism'.

After noting in the margin that 'necessity does not disappear, when it becomes freedom', he writes:

When one reads Hegel on causality, it appears strange at first glance that he dwells so relatively lightly on this theme, beloved of the Kantians. Why? Because, for him causality is only one of the determinations of the universal connection, which he has already grasped in a much deeper, and all-sided manner, in all its development, has from the very beginning and always emphasised this connection (reciprocal transitions), etc., etc. It would be very instructive to compare the 'travail' of neo-empiricism (respective 'physical idealism') with the solution, or more accurately, with the dialectical method of Hegel.¹³³

Lenin thus fully approves of the short shrift Hegel makes of causality as an isolated, narrow topic.

His approval comes just before we reach the final part of the *Science of Logic*, on the doctrine of the notion, or subjective logic, where we get Lenin's full discussion on self-movement. Unlike his approach to 'The Doctrine of Being', where he took extensive notes only in the first part, Lenin has taken notes fairly evenly throughout the book on essence, since most of its chapters seemed to have a relationship to issues raised by Marxists. We have seen how he has moved, step by step, sometimes seemingly away from but in general toward a new appreciation of Hegel – and away from the pre-1914 Marxism as seen in Engels, Plekhanov, and his own earlier writings.

In his reading of 'The Doctrine of Essence' Lenin has developed his concept of dialectic still further. (1) He has deepened his grasp of the interrelationship of essence and appearance, whether in the early form of illusory being or the later forms of appearance and actuality. He no longer views appearance

¹³¹ *SL* 559.

¹³² *CW* 38:159–60.

¹³³ *CW* 38:162.

as reducible to essence. (2) He has found self-movement to be a major part of the category of contradiction. (3) Most of all, he has identified with Hegel's critique of the commonsense concept of cause and effect. (4) Nevertheless, he continues occasionally to affirm that he is reading Hegel minus 'God and the Absolute'.

The Subjective Logic: The Core of Lenin's 1914 Hegel Studies

The final section of the *Science of Logic*, 'The Doctrine of the Notion', which Hegel terms the 'subjective logic' and 'the realm of subjectivity or freedom', is the heart and soul of Hegel's dialectic.¹ It is not, we shall see, that the subject matter of 'the notion' (or concept) is entirely new. Rather, it is a unique approach to this subject matter, putting freedom and self-movement at its centre, that distinguishes Hegel's doctrine of the notion. As I will demonstrate in this chapter, Hegel's stress on subjectivity has a great impact on Lenin. For Hegel, the notion, or concept, in philosophy is directly connected to and flows out of his concept of freedom and subjectivity. At the same time, to really develop itself, this subjectivity needs the power of philosophical thought, as exemplified by the notion. As Marcuse notes:

Freedom is, in the last analysis, not an attribute of the thinking subject as such, but of the truth that this subject holds and wields. Freedom is thus an attribute of the notion, and the true form of reality in which the essence of being is realised is the notion ... Hegel's Doctrine of the Notion really develops the categories of freedom. These comprehend the world as it appears when thought has liberated itself from the power of a 'reified' reality, when the subject has emerged as the 'substance' of being.²

In this concluding book of the *Science of Logic*, Hegel takes us from the concept of subjectivity to a critique of traditional categories in logic such as the syllogism and, finally, to the absolute idea. From the beginning Hegel emphasises that 'with the Notion, therefore, we have entered the realm of freedom'.³

The section of Lenin's abstract covering 'The Doctrine of the Notion' consists of over 60 printed pages of notes and excerpts for only 269 pages of Hegel's text. It is here that Lenin has taken his most extensive notes. On that ground alone it could be argued that this section is the core of Lenin's response to Hegel. More important than the length of Lenin's notes, however, is their depth, their range

¹ *SL* 571.

² Marcuse 1960, pp. 155–6.

³ *SL* 582.

of concepts, and the increasingly greater extent to which Lenin begins to speak with his own voice. He makes long summaries of what the dialectic now means to him as a result of his having read closely Hegel's *Science of Logic*.

1 The Notion in General: The 'Self-Conscious Subject'

Lenin has not completely given up on the idea of 'inverting' Hegel's idealistic standpoint even at the level of the notion. Thus, as this book of the *Science of Logic* opens, and Hegel writes that being and essence are 'moments' of the 'becoming' of the notion, Lenin objects to such idealistic language: 'Should be inverted: concepts [Notions] are the highest product of the brain, the highest product of matter'.⁴ The stress on matter is reminiscent of his earlier *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*. Lenin seems here to question a core argument of Hegel's *Science of Logic*, the argument that being and essence rest on the notion, or concept, which is more fundamental than either of them.

This does not mean, however, that Lenin objects to Hegel's critique here of Spinoza's concept of substance, unlike some Marxists such as Althusser or Maximilien Rubel, who have preferred Spinoza to Hegel.⁵ Lenin summarises Hegel's critique of Spinoza's concept of substance in the opening pages of 'The Doctrine of the Notion'. This critique is especially notable because it includes a detailed description of Hegel's concept of immanent critique, a critique that, Hegel writes, is not 'external', but 'must penetrate the opponent's stronghold and meet him on his own ground'.⁶ As part of his critique Hegel attacks Spinoza for lacking a concept of 'the freedom and independence of the self-conscious subject'.⁷ Lenin takes down some of this, underlining the phrase about freedom and self-consciousness. In his synopsis Lenin writes that in 'Spinoza's system there is no free, independent, conscious subject', and that 'in Spinoza also thought is an attribute of substance'.⁸ Lenin makes no objection in his notes to these Hegelian critiques of Spinoza, and in fact he seems to identify with them, even though they seem at variance with what he wrote on the previous page of his notes about matter as the determinant.

4 CW 38:167.

5 There are many critiques of Althusser's position on Hegel. For a discussion of Rubel, see Anderson 1992, pp. 67–91.

6 SL 581.

7 SL 581.

8 CW 38:168.

From this point on Lenin becomes absorbed in Hegel's critique of Kant. He records and applauds several attacks by Hegel on Kant's thing-in-itself. Also, he seems no longer as wary as he was previously of Hegel's absolute, writing in his abstract: 'Hegel *raises* Kant's idealism from being subjective to being objective and absolute'.⁹ Lenin is particularly impressed by the following passage, which he takes down, writing the last few lines in capital letters: 'here, too, the Notion is to be regarded not as the act of the self-conscious understanding, not as the *subjective understanding*, but as the Notion in its own absolute character which constitutes a *stage of nature* as well as of *spirit* [mind]. Life, or organic nature, is the stage of nature at which the Notion emerges'.¹⁰ Lenin regards the last lines of this passage, on Hegel's categories of life and nature, as connected to materialism, and he writes in the margin of his abstract: 'The "eve" of the transformation of objective idealism into materialism'.¹¹ This is, as we will see, the first of many instances where Lenin ties Hegel's concept of nature to materialism.

On the one hand, this procedure has the merit of stressing that Hegel's logical categories include a real, often historical, content. On the other hand, however, this same procedure serves to limit Lenin's reading of Hegel, leading him on occasion to subordinate the dialectic to materialism in a one-sided manner. In the previously quoted passage from Hegel, it means that Lenin stops his quotation just before Hegel adds that when the notion emerges directly from nature, it is still 'unaware of itself and unthinking', as well as 'blind'. This state of affairs is only a preliminary stage, however, and 'the Notion that is self-conscious pertains solely to mind'.¹² Thus, although quick to identify Hegel's transition from nature to notion with materialism, Lenin skips over the equally important transition from nature to mind or spirit, in which the sphere of self-consciousness develops more fully. I will take up this problem a bit later, when it reemerges during Lenin's discussion of the absolute idea.

Lenin sums up this passage and many preceding ones, all of which he has taken down in his abstract, as follows: '*Hegel refutes Kant, precisely, epistemologically.* (Engels himself *probably* had this passage in mind when he wrote in *Ludwig Feuerbach* that the *main* point against Kant had already been made by Hegel, insofar as this was possible from an idealistic standpoint), – exposing Kant's duality and inconsistency, his, so to speak, vacillation between empiricism (= materialism) and idealism, Hegel himself arguing *wholly and exclusively*

9 CW 38:168.

10 SL 586.

11 CW 38:169.

12 SL 586.

from the standpoint of a *more consistent* idealism'.¹³ What is at issue for Hegel here is Kant's dualism, his concessions to scepticism and empiricism, and the strict separation that Kant maintains between ethical and factual analysis. In addition, however, as seen directly in the passage just quoted, Lenin is still relying in important ways on Engels's truncated view of the Hegel-Marx relationship.

He also takes down Hegel's critique of Kant's concessions to empiricism: 'People often say, "It is only a notion", contrasting the notion ... with sensuous, spatial and temporal, palpable reality as something more excellent than the Notion'.¹⁴ Hegel continues: 'But philosophy gives a *reasoned* [*begriffene*] insight into the true state of the case with regard to sensuous being ... Abstract thinking, therefore, is not to be regarded as a mere setting aside of the sensuous material'.¹⁵ Siding with Hegel, Lenin sums all this up for himself as follows:

Hegel is *essentially* completely right against Kant. Thought, emerging from the concrete to the abstract, does not separate – if it is *correct* (NB) (and Kant, like all philosophers, speaks about correct thinking) – *from* truth, but goes toward it. Abstraction of *matter*, of natural *law*, abstraction of *value*, etc., in short all scientific (correct, serious, not nonsensical, not absurd) abstractions reflect nature more deeply, truly, *fully*. From living observation to abstract thinking, *and from this to practice* – such is the dialectical road to knowledge of *truth*, the knowledge of objective reality.¹⁶

Like Hegel, Lenin is concerned with the importance of abstraction in analysing the world and rejects the separation between notion and reality.

He quotes another similar passage from Hegel defending the importance of abstract categories. That passage concludes: 'Could one ever have thought that philosophy would deny truth to essences [*Wesen*] because they lack the spatial and temporal material of the sensuous world?'.¹⁷ Here Lenin draws a line of comparison from Hegel to the concept of value in Marx's *Capital*: 'Here, too, Hegel is *essentially right*; value is a category which 'lacks the material of the sensuous world', but it is truer than the law of supply and demand'.¹⁸ This is an

13 CW 38:169–70.

14 SL 587.

15 SL 588.

16 CW 38:171.

17 SL 590; translation altered.

18 CW 38:172.

apparent reference to the opening passages of *Capital*, where Marx writes that in measuring the exchange value of commodities, 'all sensuous characteristics are extinguished', and therefore only the power of 'abstraction' allows us to find their common component, 'that of being products of labor'.¹⁹ This is what allows Marx to attack and transcend the market law of supply and demand, where value is determined by socially necessary labour time. Here, it appears that Lenin has gained a deeper understanding of one of Marx's key economic categories from Hegel's chapter on the notion, while at the same time he has found yet another close affinity between Marx's dialectic and that of Hegel.

Lenin next takes down a whole series of paragraphs, culminating in the following critique of Kant's thing-in-itself:

It will always stand out as a marvel how the Kantian philosophy recognised the relation of thought to sensuous reality, beyond which it did not advance, as only a relative relation of mere Appearance, and perfectly well recognised and enunciated a higher unity of both in the Idea in general and, for example, in the Idea of an intuitive understanding, and yet stopped short at this relative relation and the assertion that the Notion is and remains utterly separate from reality – thus asserting as *truth* what it declared to be finite cognition, and denouncing as an unjustified extravagance and a figment of thought what it recognised as *truth* and of which it established the specific notion.²⁰

Lenin highlights the second half of this passage but does not comment on it.

Although happy to find affinities to Marx, Lenin still tends to dismiss some of Hegel's discussion of consciousness, especially where Hegel refers to going beyond Aristotle's 'descriptive natural history of the phenomena of thinking just as they occur'.²¹ Lenin writes: 'Here Hegel is idealistically unclear, and fails to speak out fully. *Mysticism*. Not psychology, not the phenomenology of mind, *but* logic = the question of truth'.²² Here, evidently, he still considers Hegel's *Phenomenology* to be a mystical work devoid of important connections to Marxism, while he extols the *Science of Logic* as dealing with 'the question of truth' rather than 'psychology'.²³ Of course, as I have mentioned, Lenin and

19 Marx 1976a: 127–128.

20 *SL* 592.

21 *SL* 595.

22 *CW* 38:175.

23 Surprisingly, Lenin fails to note the brief but explicit attack within this chapter on materialism, a concept that, Hegel argues, 'takes thought to be simple' (*SL* 615).

his generation of Marxists were unaware that Marx devoted his 'Critique of the Hegelian Dialectic' (1844) to the *Phenomenology*. Lenin's notes also continue to skip over discussions of one of Hegel's key categories, the negation of the negation. In a passage a few pages later, which Lenin does not record, Hegel writes: 'Essence is the *first negation* of being, which has thereby become illusory being; the Notion is the *second negation* or the negation of this negation, and is therefore *being* once more, but being that has been restored as the infinite mediation and negativity of being within itself'.²⁴ Lenin not only skips over this passage but also attacks as a recourse to idealism Hegel's remark a few paragraphs later that 'the *adequate Notion* is the *Idea*' and that '*objective* Notion ... possesses *in and for itself*, also a *posited* identity'.²⁵ Lenin records these phrases and then writes: 'objectivism + mysticism and betrayal of development'.²⁶

On the other hand, Findlay writes that Hegel's notion, far from being mystical or purely idealistic, has a real material content: 'The thought of Logic, in particular, while in a sense purely formal, without the rich content which will accrue to it from the study of nature and mind, has, none the less, Hegel holds, a content, a material, a "reality" peculiar to itself ... It is in this sense and no other that Hegel holds Universal Concepts to be "concrete" and "self-specifying". There is no trace in his practice, despite some use of generative metaphors, of any attempt to beget what is Specific or Individual out of the mere Universality of the Notion'.²⁷ Thus Findlay's account is in some respects very different from what Lenin sees in these early discussions of the notion, but as he goes further into Hegel's text, Lenin will come closer to a position like Findlay's.

2 The Syllogism and the Relation of Hegel to Marxism

2.1 *Critique of the Syllogism in Formal Logic*

Lenin now goes very lightly over nearly sixty pages of Hegel's text, pages dealing both with additional preliminary discussions of the notion and with the category of judgment, before stopping to take some detailed notes on the chapter on the syllogism. According to Findlay, this part of Hegel's text, including the chapter on the syllogism, 'is the only part that answers to the tradi-

24 SL 596.

25 SL 597.

26 CW 38:175.

27 Findlay 1958, p. 228.

tional concept of Logic'.²⁸ This focus on traditional logic, together with Lenin's interest in dialectics rather than formal logic, perhaps partly explains why he does not take down or comment on any passages from the chapter on judgment; in addition, however, he writes in his abstract that he finds these chapters 'in the highest degree abstract and abstruse' and 'a best means for getting a headache'.²⁹ Instead of making a detailed analysis, Lenin writes a general summary:

Apparently, here too what is important for Hegel is *to mark* the transitions. From a certain point of view, under certain conditions, the universal is the particular, the particular is the universal. Not only (1) the *connection*, and an indissoluble connection, of all notions and judgements, but (2) *transitions* of one into the other, and not only transition, but also (3) *identity of opposites*. That is what is important to Hegel. But this only 'pierces through' the *mist* of analysis of the 'arch-abstruse'. The history of thought from the point of view of development and application of universal notions and categories of the Logic – *that is what is needed!*³⁰

Lenin does quite a bit more with Hegel's treatment of the syllogism. He seems especially to enjoy Hegel's humorous dismissal of the syllogisms of 'school logic', and he writes: 'Quoting ... the "famous" syllogism – "all men are mortal, Gaius is a man, therefore he is mortal" – Hegel shrewdly adds: "Boredom immediately descends when such a syllogism is heard approaching" – this is declared to be due to the "useless form" [of the syllogism in formal logic]'.³¹ But Lenin has a far different attitude to the dialectical syllogisms that Hegel develops, one of which he connects to Marx's *Capital*.

He applauds Hegel's remark that 'everything is a syllogism'³² and writes: 'Hegel's analysis of the Syllogisms (I-P-U, 'individual, particular, universal', P-I-U, etc.) is reminiscent of Marx's imitation of Hegel in Chapter I'.³³ On the one hand, Lenin is no doubt referring to statements by Marx in the afterword to the 1873 German edition of *Capital* on how he 'coquetted' with Hegel in the first chapter of that work. There, as I discussed in Chapter 1, Marx also writes that his dialectical method is the 'opposite' of Hegel's. On the other hand, Lenin may

28 Findlay 1958, p. 230.

29 *cw* 38:176.

30 *cw* 38:177.

31 *cw* 38:177.

32 *SL* 669.

33 *cw* 38:177–78.

also be referring to the way in which Hegel's doctrine of the notion sheds light on Marx's theory of value, as we have seen a bit earlier in his notes.

Just how remarkably Hegel affected Lenin here might be traced by a closer look at the following long statement from Lenin, which he entitles 'The question of the true significance of Hegel's *Logic*'. The first part of it reads: 'The forming of (abstract) notions and their utilisation *already include* the presentation, the conviction, the *consciousness* of the law of the objective world connections. It is absurd to single out causality from this. It is impossible to reject the objectivity of notions, the objectivity of the universal in the particular and in the individual. Consequently, Hegel considerably more profoundly than Kant and others, investigates the reflection of the movement of the objective world in the movement of notions'.³⁴ In his statement about 'objective world connections' Lenin seems closer to Findlay's previously cited view that Hegel's notions are not mystical or purely abstract but have a real content and are related to the material world, something Lenin did not appear to see when he began his study of 'The Doctrine of the Notion'. Second, Lenin's statement here shows that he is no longer as interested as he once was in the issue of causality apart from the general issue of objective world connections. At the level of the notion, even Hegel's earlier critique of causality in 'The Doctrine of Essence' seems limited. The stress now is on movement and self-movement.

Lenin continues his statement, now linking Hegel once again to the first chapter of *Capital*: 'Just as the simple value form, the individual act of exchange of a given commodity for another, already includes in an undeveloped form *all* major contradictions of capitalism, – so the simplest *generalisation*, the first and simplest forming of *notions* (judgements, syllogisms, etc.) signifies the ever-deeper cognition of the *objective* world connections. It is necessary here to seek the real sense, significance and role of Hegelian *Logic*. This NB'.³⁵ In this statement and the other two less explicit ones just cited, Lenin is the first Marxist of the twentieth century to stress the 'Hegelianism' of Chapter 1 of *Capital*. That chapter's structure begins with the seemingly simple form of the commodity and yet ends with the fetishism of the commodity. It is important not to miss this newness in Lenin: making notes on Hegel, he states nothing less than that in chapter 1 of *Capital*, the 'simple form of value ... already includes in an undeveloped form all the main contradictions of capitalism'.

34 CW 38:178.

35 CW 38:178–79.

2.2 *Lenin's Aphorism on Critique and Self-Critique of Pre-1914 Marxism*

In one of her discussions of Lenin's Hegel Notebooks, Dunayevskaya writes: 'It is under the section on 'Syllogisms', where Hegel destroys the opposition between subjectivity and objectivity, that Lenin bursts forth with the aphorisms that reveal how decisive was his break with his own philosophic past'.³⁶ Lenin begins in his notes with what he calls 'two aphorisms'. He directs them against the established Marxist philosophy on which he had been brought up, and against Plekhanov especially. He entitles these two aphorisms, 'Regarding the question of the criticism of contemporary Kantianism, Machism, etc.: 1. Plekhanov criticises Kantianism (and agnosticism in general) more from the vulgar materialistic than the dialectical materialistic point of view, *insofar* as he merely rejects their views from the outside, but does not correct them (as Hegel corrected Kant), deepening, generalising, broadening them, showing the *connections* and *transitions* of each and every notion. 2. (At the beginning of the twentieth century) Marxists criticised the Kantians and Humists more in a Feuerbachian (and Büchnerian), than a Hegelian, manner'.³⁷ There are several major issues here. First, there is the application of the term 'vulgar materialist' to Plekhanov. This is very significant. Previous to 1914 Lenin, following Engels, saw two philosophical camps, idealism and materialism, and placed Plekhanov in the camp of materialism, even when he disagreed with Plekhanov's political positions. As I discussed in the previous chapter, while still looking at 'The Doctrine of Being' Lenin first articulated his category of 'vulgar materialism' as a critique of established Marxism. He also wrote at that time of Hegel's notion of the 'transformation of the ideal into the real' as a 'profound' one.³⁸ He did not, however, mention any specific exponent of vulgar materialism. Now he names such an example, Plekhanov, the chief philosopher of Russian Marxism and one of the key authorities on dialectics in the Second International. He argues that Plekhanov is not really a dialectician because his critique of Kant was external rather than dialectical and immanent.³⁹

Second, there is the issue of becoming 'Hegelian'. Never before has Lenin implied that Marxists would need to carry out a 'Hegelian' analysis. Up to this juncture he has pointed more to the need to study Hegel as a way of really understanding Marx. Here he implies that certain philosophical issues such as

36 Dunayevskaya 1958, p. 169.

37 *cw* 38:179.

38 *cw* 38:114.

39 Unfortunately, as discussed in Chapter 4, Lenin never made his concept of vulgar materialism public.

the critique of Kantianism call for an analysis in 'a Hegelian manner'. Lenin thus has become the first Hegelian Marxist of the twentieth century.

Third, there is the implication that Feuerbach too is a vulgar materialist, or at the least, that his materialism is very far from being fully dialectical in the Hegelian manner. This is a major change even from Lenin's essay 'Karl Marx', written only weeks earlier. There, as I discussed in Chapter 1, Lenin, far from critiquing Feuerbach, writes of the latter's 'historic significance' because of 'his having resolutely broken with Hegel's idealism'.⁴⁰ This is also an indication of which parts of the essay 'Karl Marx' Lenin may have wanted to change, desires he expressed in his letter to the publisher after he completed his 'Abstract of Hegel's *Science of Logic*'. Unfortunately, he never got to make those changes.

Fourth, there are strong indications here of a critique of his own earlier views. Although many Marxists had written against Kantianism, only in Russian Marxism did Machism become a major issue. Lenin and Plekhanov were the two major figures to critique Mach within Russian Marxism. Thus, Lenin's reference to 'criticism of contemporary Kantianism, Machism, etc.', which he places 'at the beginning of the twentieth century', very likely refers not only to Plekhanov's work but also to his own earlier and crudely materialist work, *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*. Lenin's earlier book had many references to Feuerbach and Engels, but few to Hegel. It is thus highly probable that he had his own book in mind when he criticised Marxists at the beginning of the twentieth century for not having carried out a really dialectical, Hegelian critique of bourgeois philosophy.

2.3 *The Aphorism on Hegel's Logic and Marx's Capital*

Lenin amplifies the preceding statements in his next aphorism, perhaps the most quoted one of all from the Hegel Notebooks. It reads: 'Aphorism: It is impossible fully to grasp Marx's *Capital*, and especially its first chapter, if you have not studied through and understood the whole of Hegel's *Logic*. Consequently, none of the Marxists for the past ½ century have understood Marx!!'.⁴¹ This is the most dramatically explicit statement by Lenin anywhere on the centrality of Hegel to Marxism. Let us examine its implications in detail.

First, he calls for Marxists to study the 'whole of Hegel's *Logic*'. Evidently Lenin, who was brought up on Engels and Plekhanov and their discussions of materialist dialectics, now calls for others to follow him in studying the whole of the *Science of Logic*. As we saw in Chapter 1, Engels had written earlier, in

⁴⁰ CW 21:50.

⁴¹ CW 38:180.

his best-known philosophical book, *Ludwig Feuerbach*, that Marxists needed to adopt materialistically Hegel's method but to reject his system. Lenin does not mention that type of division between system and method here, and his call for the study of *the whole* of the *Science of Logic* could easily be read as a move beyond Engels's simplistic division between system and method. Here, Lenin apparently sees his Hegel Notebooks not only as a private study that he will later use to write on politics and economics but also as the type of journey into Hegel that all Marxist theorists need to undertake.

Second, whereas the previous aphorism suggests the need to go to Hegel to critique what Lenin regards as rivals to Marxism, such as Kantianism and Machism, here the emphasis is quite different. Marxists need to study Hegel directly to understand the most important theoretical work in all of Marxism, *Capital*. This is true for the whole of that work, but 'especially its first chapter'. It is not limited to the first chapter, however. Nonetheless, the emphasis on the first chapter is a very innovative one for Marxism in 1914. Although Lenin never mentions the fetishism of commodities explicitly in his abstract – something that Lukács was the first to stress nearly a decade later in *History and Class Consciousness* – here we can see that the dialectic rather than economics is beginning to emerge for Lenin as the centre of *Capital* and thus perhaps even the whole of Marxism.⁴²

The third point here for Lenin is once again his break with his own philosophical past, especially *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*. Here, as in the two previous aphorisms, Lenin seems to include himself among the Marxists who, by not having 'studied through and understood the *whole* of Hegel's *Logic*', created a situation where 'none of the Marxists for the past ½ century have understood Marx'. I interpret this as a very grave charge, not only against other theorists, but also against himself.⁴³ Once again, I argue this in part on the

42 Lenin's statement is by no means as explicit or as far-reaching as was Lukács's remark in *History and Class Consciousness* that in *Capital* 'the chapter dealing with the fetish character of the commodity contains within itself the whole of historical materialism' (1971a, p. 170). It should also be pointed out that by 1923 Lukács had not read Lenin's Hegel Notebooks, which had not yet been published. Still, it appears that Lenin anticipated by several years Lukács's rediscovery of the integral relationship of Marxism to Hegel. Lukács publicly criticised Engels, however, something Lenin never did.

43 This aphorism has led some to accuse Lenin of arrogance for his supposed dismissive critique of all Marxist theorists at the beginning of the century, but who actually made this accusation is unclear. Service, who relies heavily on vol. 2 of Kolakowski 1978 for his discussion of Lenin's Hegel Notebooks, attributes this notion of Lenin's arrogance to Kolakowski (Service 1991, p. 92). The latter certainly is critical of Lenin, but not on this particular issue. I could not find an accusation of arrogance in this regard in Kolakowski's text at the point where Service cites him. Service also argues that this passage has been translated improp-

basis that both this aphorism and the one explicitly criticising Plekhanov are preceded by the phrase ‘criticism of contemporary Kantianism, Machism, etc’. Who more than Lenin and Plekhanov was preoccupied with these issues?

2.4 *Further Discussion of the Syllogism*

Lenin’s next aphorism is more closely tied to the content of Hegel’s chapter on the syllogism. After listing some of the types of syllogism that Hegel takes up in this chapter – the syllogisms of analogy, necessity, and so on – Lenin writes that Hegel’s task in this chapter consists mainly of ‘the exposition of connection and transitions’.⁴⁴ His aphorism follows immediately: ‘Hegel actually demonstrated that the logical forms and laws are not an empty shell, but *reflection* of the objective world. More precisely, did not demonstrate, but made a brilliant guess’.⁴⁵ This aphorism continues some of the themes we have seen earlier: the attempt to view Hegel’s dialectic in historical and materialist terms by arguing that his categories are more rooted than is generally supposed in the objective world.

Next, Lenin turns once again to the *Encyclopedia Logic*, copying into his abstract some long extracts from its discussion of the syllogism. The first of these deals with the difference between Hegel’s concepts of reason [*Vernunft*] and understanding [*Verstand*]. The understanding views necessity and freedom as opposites, whereas with reason, writes Hegel, ‘the true and rational notion of freedom contains necessity sublated within itself’.⁴⁶ Lenin writes in the margin simply ‘Freedom and Necessity’.⁴⁷ The next sentence in Hegel’s text, which Lenin does not copy out, defines Christianity as true reason while describing deism as ‘just the understanding’s concept of God’.⁴⁸ Lenin does not avail himself here of what could have been an opportunity to attack Hegel for clericalism, mysticism, and so forth.

erly and that Lenin’s phrase is best rendered as ‘not one Marxist has *completely* understood Marx in the past half-century’ (p. 92). This seems plausible, since I too doubt that Lenin meant in this aphorism to dismiss totally all previous Marxism, including his own work and that of others on political and economic theory. But it does leave plenty of room for the interpretation I am making here, that Lenin meant his aphorism as a self-critique of the concept of dialectic in his own previous writings and those of the leading Marxist theorists of his generation, none of whom made the type of return to Hegel that he did in 1914.

44 *CW* 38:180.

45 *CW* 38:180.

46 *EL* ¶ 182.

47 *CW* 38:181.

48 *EL* ¶ 182.

Lenin then takes down some passages that deal with the relationship of logic to nature and mind. In these passages Hegel suggests that logic and mind are grounded in nature, which Lenin probably sees as having a relationship to materialism. One of these passages that Lenin copies states: 'As the immediate totality, Nature unfolds itself in the two extremes of the logical Idea and Mind'.⁴⁹ Here, nature is the ground of logic and mind. In his notes on this passage Lenin takes down only those parts of Hegel's discussion that show nature as the ground for logic and mind and skips over other passages that show that the relationship of these three terms is in fact for Hegel a circular interrelationship, including the concluding form that Hegel presents, where logic 'is the absolute substance of Mind and of Nature'.⁵⁰

In his own summary comments in his abstract, Lenin, although stressing Hegel's concept of nature as ground for logic and mind, also makes another implicit critique of his own crude reflection theory in *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*: 'Knowledge is the reflection of nature by man. But this is not a simple, not an immediate, not a complete reflection, but the process of a series of abstractions, the formation and development of concepts, laws, etc. ... Man cannot comprehend = reflect = mirror nature as a whole, in its completeness, its 'immediate totality', he can only eternally come closer to this, creating abstractions, concepts, laws, a scientific picture of world, etc., etc.'⁵¹ This notion that theory can never completely mirror or reflect nature, and can do so even approximately only through 'the process of a series of abstractions', is some distance from the reflection theory of a mirrorlike mind that he advocated in 1908.

Next he takes down a passage from the syllogism of necessity, where Hegel once again criticises the logic of the understanding, in which 'thinking is taken to be a merely subjective and formal activity, and the objective world that confronts thinking counts as something fixed and present in its own right'.⁵² Instead, Hegel argues, objectivity and subjectivity are interrelated. Lenin applauds this: 'Very profound and clever! The laws of logic are the reflections of the objective in the subjective consciousness of man'.⁵³ Hegel ends his discussion of the syllogism by referring again to the issue of the proof of the existence of God, which prompts Lenin to write: 'Nonsense about the ontological argument, about God!'.⁵⁴ Lenin ends his discussion here, however,

49 EL ¶ 187.

50 EL ¶ 187.

51 CW 38:182.

52 EL ¶ 192.

53 CW 38:183.

54 CW 38:184.

by recording and highlighting the following statement from the *Encyclopedia Logic* about the unity of subjectivity and objectivity: ‘The explanation shows how absurd it is to consider subjectivity and objectivity as a fixed and abstract antithesis. Both moments are thoroughly dialectical’.⁵⁵

3 Teleology: Lenin Discovers a Concept of Practice and Labor in Hegel

The section on objectivity in ‘The Doctrine of the Notion’ contains three chapters, ‘Mechanism’, ‘Chemism’, and ‘Teleology’. The first two offer a critique of natural science, and Lenin spends little time on them, writing that they are ‘extremely abstruse and almost complete nonsense’.⁵⁶ The chapter on teleology is of far greater interest to Lenin, since part of it deals once again with the issue of causality, on which he commented in his notes on ‘The Doctrine of Essence’. The category of teleology does not involve Hegel in the activity of which he is often accused: imposing a great purpose on human history in the sense of Christian eschatology. In fact, Hegel begins his discussion of teleology by separating himself from ‘the concept of an extramundane intelligence’ as ‘favoured by piety’.⁵⁷ What is involved is the difference between how cause and effect operate for inanimate objects as in mechanism and chemism, on the one hand, and for living beings on the other. Thus the notion of teleology is caught up with the notion of life, which Hegel deals with in the chapter following that on teleology. Taylor writes that ‘in teleology we have the fullest embodiment of internal necessity’ and further, that this category exhibits well Hegel’s concept of totality: ‘Teleology is thus the category in which we can account for the kind of totality Hegel envisages. For it is made up of independent, external realities, whose deployment nevertheless follows a necessity, but which necessity is not imposed from outside but inheres in the external reality itself’.⁵⁸ It is in fact the notions of freedom and necessity that interest Lenin as he begins reading this chapter.

He begins his notes on teleology by taking down and applauding once again Hegel’s critique of Kant’s view of the matter, but without also recording Hegel’s several tributes here to Kant for having greatly advanced the discussion of teleology. At this point Lenin’s notes begin to have pages with a vertical line drawn

55 *EL* ¶ 194.

56 *CW* 38:185.

57 *SL* 735.

58 Taylor 1975, pp. 321–22.

down the middle. On the left side of the page he quotes from Hegel, and on the right side he 'translates' Hegel's formulations into what he calls 'materialist dialectics'. Apparently Lenin does this less to 'correct' Hegel as to use him in the reconstruction of his own concept of Marxist dialectics.

Lenin first quotes a lengthy passage from Hegel on the relationship of natural (mechanical or chemical) processes of change and development to those that work on and through human consciousness. In his 'translation' into materialist dialectics on the other side of the page of his abstract, Lenin writes: 'The aims of man seem at first alien ("other") in relationship to nature. Consciousness of man, of science ("notion") reflects essence, the substance of nature, but at the same time this consciousness is external in relationship to nature (not at once, not simply coinciding with it)'.⁵⁹ Thus, human aims and consciousness are hardly a crude reflection of nature and cannot really be described by mechanical concepts. Lenin develops these remarks further when he takes up Hegel's discussion of means and ends, and he writes that human aims or ends appear to be 'independent of the world', but in fact, 'the aims of man are generated by the objective world and presuppose it as the given, existent'.⁶⁰

He becomes excited by Hegel's sense of the interrelationship of human consciousness to the material world, especially in Hegel's brief discussion of human work and the relationship of tools to purposive human labour. He takes down the following passage, just after Hegel argues that although our ends or aims might seem to predominate when we use tools, in fact the means we employ in some respects outweigh the ends we have in mind: 'To this extent the *means* is *superior* to the *finite* ends of *external* purposiveness: the *plough* is more honourable than are immediately the enjoyments procured by it and which are ends. The *tool* lasts, while the immediate enjoyments pass away and are forgotten. In his tools man possesses power over external nature, even though in respect of his ends he is, on the contrary, subject to it'.⁶¹ Next to this passage Lenin writes in the margin of his abstract: 'the germs of historical materialism in Hegel'.⁶² As we will see in Chapter 7, Lukács gives great emphasis to this discussion by Lenin of Hegel while also stressing 'the proximity of Hegel's ideas to historical materialism'.⁶³

Lenin is particularly interested here in Hegel's use of examples from human labor, and he brings the notion of practice into his discussion of Hegel from this point on:

59 *CW* 38:188.

60 *CW* 38:189.

61 *SL* 747.

62 *CW* 38:189.

63 Lukács 1975 [1948], p. 348.

When Hegel tries – sometimes even strains himself and worries to death – to subsume the purposive activity of man under the categories of logic, saying that this activity is the ‘syllogism’, that the subject plays the role of some sort of ‘member’ in the logical ‘figure’ of the ‘syllogism’, and so on, – *then this is not only a strain, not only a game*. There is a very deep content, purely materialistic. It is necessary to invert this: the practical activity of man, repeated billions of times, must lead the consciousness of man to the repetition of the various logical figures in order that these can achieve the significance of an *axiom*. *This nota bene*.⁶⁴

Lenin is interested not only in the category of materialism, in seeing the relationship of Hegel’s categories to history and the material world, but here, in ‘The Subjective Logic, or the Doctrine of the Notion’, he is increasingly translating Hegel’s concept of subjectivity as practice.

Lenin continues to be astounded by the degree to which Hegel conceives of logic as being not abstract but directly connected with daily human activity and practice: ‘Remarkable: Hegel goes through the practical, purposive activity of man, to get to the “Idea” as correspondence of the notion with the object, to the Idea as truth. A very close approach to the view that man by his practice demonstrates the objective correctness of his ideas, notions, knowledge, science’.⁶⁵ Here, at the end of the chapter on teleology, and at the point of transition to Hegel’s concluding section, ‘The Idea’, Lenin sees in Hegel not an abstract and otherworldly idealism but key links to materialism and to practice, especially in Hegel’s discussion of tools and labour. And far from the chapter on teleology having emphasised any notion of divine providence, Lenin has found there some of Hegel’s most earthy and materialistic discussion.⁶⁶

4 The Idea in General: ‘The Very Best Exposition of Dialectics’

Lenin is particularly impressed by the six pages of introductory material with which Hegel begins Section 3 of ‘The Doctrine of the Notion’, entitled ‘The Idea’. He writes that this short discussion ‘and the corresponding paragraphs in the *Encyclopedia [Logic]* (§ 213–15) is nearly the very best exposition of dialectics. Here, then, the correspondence, so to speak, of logic and epistemology

64 *cw* 38:190.

65 *cw* 38:191.

66 Although Lenin does not mention it, at one point in the chapter on teleology Hegel refers to the ‘production of material things’ (*SL* 738).

is demonstrated in a remarkably brilliant way'.⁶⁷ Lefebvre writes that Lenin is correct to single out Hegel's brief discussion of the idea because this part of the *Science of Logic* 'shows wonderfully the profound rapport between history, knowledge and theory of knowledge, logic and dialectic'. Lefebvre argues further that 'a philosophically correct exposition of the dialectic method can conceive itself only at a very profound and high level', that is, at the level of what Hegel calls the idea.⁶⁸

Lenin singles out the following passage, where Hegel argues that the idea is real and tangible: 'we must also reject even more vigorously that estimate of the Idea according to which it is not anything actual, and true thoughts are said to be *only ideas*'.⁶⁹ Far from rejecting this classic statement of Hegelian idealism, at this stage Lenin simply paraphrases it and then seemingly concurs with Hegel's statement: 'It is equally incorrect to regard the Idea as something "unreal" – as people say "it is merely an idea"'.⁷⁰ However, he skips over some fairly clear references to historical and political issues in the same passage, as in Hegel's statement that 'wholes like the state and the church cease to exist when the unity of their Notion and their reality is dissolved'.⁷¹ The latter could easily be read as a reference to both the Reformation and the French Revolution. He also skips over Hegel's definition of the idea as the unity of subject and object.

Lenin does, however, take down Hegel's long two-part definition of the idea as (1) 'the simple truth, the identity of the Notion and objectivity as *a universal*', and (2) 'the *process* of sundering itself into individuality and its inorganic nature, and again of bringing this inorganic nature under the power of the subject and returning to the first simple universality'. The latter is a development that leads to a concept of freedom where 'the Idea possesses within itself also the *most stubborn opposition*'.⁷² Once again, he puts the quotation from Hegel on one side of the page and his own synopsis on the other side, where he writes: 'Correspondence of thought with the object is a process. Thought (= man) must not present to itself thought in the form of a dead repose, in the form of a simple picture (image) of the pale (spent) thought, without impulse or motion, as an abstraction. The idea contains also the strongest contradiction'.⁷³ Here is

67 *CW* 38:192.

68 Lefebvre 1957, pp. 202–3. Lefebvre's quite extensive treatments of Lenin's Hegel Notebooks are discussed in detail in chapters 7 and 8.

69 *SL* 755–56.

70 *CW* 38:193.

71 *SL* 757.

72 *SL* 759.

73 *CW* 38:194–5.

yet another strong implicit critique of the reflection theory in *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*, since in this passage from Lenin's abstract, ideas do not directly reflect the object as a 'simple picture' but interact with the objective world as part of a process.

Lenin begins now to take up Hegel's concept of cognition. He sees it as a process, an interrelationship between the objective world and human cognition: 'Cognition is the eternal, infinite approach of thought to the object. The reflection of nature in the thought of man must be understood not in a "dead", not in an "abstract" manner, *not without movement, not without contradictions, but in an eternal process of movement, emergence of contradictions and their solution*'.⁷⁴ Here it is apparently not a question of idealism versus materialism. Instead, the stress falls on the Hegelian concept of the self-movement of human cognition in relationship to the material world. This concept is different from both contemplative idealism and contemplative materialism. It is the self-movement of cognition of human thought or awareness, which appears to attract Lenin as revolutionary protagonist.

He also continues, as in the chapter on teleology, to connect the idea to action, to practice. He takes down a passage from the *Science of Logic* on 'cognition and action'⁷⁵ where Hegel foreshadows what he will develop in a later chapter, 'The Idea of Cognition'. Here, in his abstract, Lenin highlights the word *action* and then writes: 'The process of ... cognition and *action* converts abstract concepts into perfected objectivity'.⁷⁶

Lenin continues as well the process of reading Hegel materialistically, all the while recognising more and more that Hegel is saying 'idealistically' that ideas have an objective force in the world and should not be dismissed as 'only ideas'. This same Hegel sees ideas as connected with the material, human world and not always residing in some abstract realm. Lenin writes the following on the Hegelian concept of totality: 'The totality of all sides of the phenomenon, of actuality and their (mutual) relation – that is what truth is composed of. Relations (= transitions = contradictions) of notions = the main content of logic, *and moreover* these notions (and their relations, transitions, contradictions) are shown as reflections of the objective world. The dialectic of things creates the dialectic of ideas, and not the reverse'.⁷⁷ In the first line of this passage Lenin seems once again to be anticipating by almost a decade something that is commonly attributed to Lukács's *History and Class Consciousness*: mak-

74 CW 38:195.

75 SL 760.

76 CW 38:195.

77 CW 38:196.

ing the Hegelian concept of totality central to Marxism. In the last sentence, however, Lenin does not concede to Hegel that ideas create the world, and he inverts Hegel, or at least Hegel as he reads him. He does not dismiss Hegel's idealism, however, and seems still to regard it as in some degree rooted in the material and natural world. Thus, after also reading and taking down part of the discussion of the idea in the *Encyclopedia Logic*, he writes: 'Hegel as a genius *guessed* the dialectics of things, phenomena, the world (nature), in the dialectic of notions'.⁷⁸

Lenin then expresses once again his own concept of dialectic, which he draws from Hegel, but with his own particular emphasis and interpretation: 'One must express this aphorism more popularly, *without* the word dialectic: thus: Hegel brilliantly *divined* in change, in the inter-relations of *all* notions, in the *identity of opposites*, in the transitions of one notion into another, in eternal change, of movement of notions, *just such a relation of things, of nature*'.⁷⁹ Here we have Lenin summing up Hegel's dialectic as the dialectic of a concrete totality, a living, breathing, human totality, in a process of self-movement and self-development. We also see here the emergence of the category of identity or unity of opposites, a category rooted in Hegel but that is Lenin's own. It will later be central to the definitions Lenin makes of dialectics as he concludes his abstract.

Still apparently responding to the *Encyclopedia Logic*, Lenin then makes a little definition of dialectics, writing in the left margin the question, 'What constitutes dialectics?' In the right margin he also writes: 'Every notion occurs in a certain relation, in a certain connection with all the rest'. The text of his brief definition reads as follows: 'Interdependence of notions <of all> without exception. Transitions of notions of one into the other <of all> without exception. Relativity of the opposition between notions ... identity of oppositions between notions'.⁸⁰ Here Lenin has zeroed in on what is central for him: the unity of opposites and the law of contradiction.

5 The Idea of Life: A 'Brilliant' Addition to the Logic

Here, at the stage of the idea, Hegel's treatment of nature is not one of inorganic matter but of the idea of life [*Das Leben*]. The young Marcuse, when he was a 'phenomenological' Marxist strongly influenced by Wilhelm Dilthey and

⁷⁸ *cw* 38:196.

⁷⁹ *cw* 38:196.

⁸⁰ *cw* 38:197; ellipsis in original, some punctuation added.

Martin Heidegger, makes the idea of life central to the whole of Hegel's work. Marcuse does so in his first book on Hegel, where he writes: 'For Hegel the Idea of Life is the ontological condition and the presupposition of cognitive activity, precisely understood in its true form as "universality", as the unity of subjectivity and objectivity, of the I and the animated world'.⁸¹ Lenin was undoubtedly aware of Dilthey's *Lebensphilosophie* [Philosophy of Life] and of the latter's 'return' to Hegel beginning in 1905 with the publication of his lectures on the young Hegel.⁸² Although Lenin does not mention Dilthey at all in his 'Abstract of Hegel's *Science of Logic*', there is a reference to 'the return to Hegel' in contemporary German philosophy in some additional notes Lenin made in 1914 on other, more academic studies of the *Science of Logic*.⁸³ This suggests at least some type of link between Lenin's return to Hegel and that taking place among Central European philosophers and culture critics of the period, including not only Dilthey but also the young Lukács. And that return was, at least in German philosophy, centred to a great extent on notions of *Lebensphilosophie*.

To be sure, Lenin's own return to Hegel springs from far different premises than that going on among German academicians. Nonetheless, it is intriguing that Lenin is quite moved by Hegel's inclusion of a chapter on life so near to the conclusion of the *Science of Logic*. Hegel begins his chapter by noting that by taking up the idea of life, 'we may seem to have overstepped the domain of logic as it is commonly conceived',⁸⁴ a passage that Lenin takes down. Hegel adds that he does so because his work is an attempt to break with formal logic: 'Certainly, if logic were to contain nothing but empty, dead forms of thought, there could be no mention in it at all of such a content as the Idea of life'.⁸⁵ Lenin comments: 'The idea of including Life in logic is comprehensible – and brilliant – from the standpoint of the process of the reflection of the objective world in the (at first individual) consciousness of man and of the testing of this consciousness (reflection) through practice'.⁸⁶ He also summarises for himself the example from Aristotle that Hegel uses in the *Encyclopedia Logic* to discuss the idea of life: 'Only in their connection are the individual limbs of the body what they are. A hand, separated from the body, is a hand only in name (Aristotle)'.⁸⁷ Lenin finds this an interesting way of presenting the concept of

81 Marcuse 1987 [1932], p. 161.

82 See Wilhelm Dilthey, *Jugendgeschichte Hegels*, in Dilthey 1959 [1905].

83 *CW* 38:239. See also *CW* 38: 58, 240, for brief mentions of Dilthey.

84 *SL* 761.

85 *SL* 761.

86 *CW* 38:202.

87 *CW* 38:202.

totality. He summarises for himself Hegel's notion of contradiction within the idea of life, where pain is an expression of 'the actual existence' of contradiction within a living being.⁸⁸ Although Lenin's summary of and remarks on the idea of life cover only two and a half pages in his abstract, he seems to view this chapter as yet another proof of the living, earthy character of Hegel's notions.

6 The Idea of Cognition: A Turning Point in Lenin's Abstract

If for Hegel the living organism is a unity of subject and object, then a higher level of this unity can be achieved at the level of cognition, or knowledge, where the living organism is free and self-conscious. Although Lenin seems to agree in general with the way Hegel presents the transition from life to cognition, he reacts against Hegel's strong statement on the importance of mind [*Geist*] over and above even life or nature: 'Since mind is not only infinitely richer than nature, but also, its essence is constituted by the absolute unity of opposites in the notion, it exhibits in its phenomenal aspect and relation to externality contradiction in its extreme form'.⁸⁹ Lenin jots this down in his notes and then, in what is probably an attack on Hegel's statement that mind is richer than nature, writes in the margin: 'mysticism!'⁹⁰

6.1 *The Idea of the True as the Theoretical Idea and Hegel's Critique of Kant's Relativism and Focus on Phenomena*

Lenin next summarises some of Hegel's critique of Kant on cognition, especially those passages where Kant is accused of separating cognition from the empirical world. Hegel accuses Kant of 'having quite simply followed Hume's style of scepticism' in the sense that the thinking 'I' is conceived in an a priori fashion as an unknowable thing-in-itself from which 'everything empirical is to be omitted'.⁹¹ Lenin records this and writes his own summary: 'In order to understand, it is necessary empirically to begin understanding, study, to rise from empiricism to the universal. In order to learn to swim, it is necessary to get into the water'.⁹² He also agrees with Hegel's sharp critique of Kant's procedure

88 SL 771.

89 SL 776.

90 CW 38:204.

91 SL 777.

92 CW 38:205.

in overcoming the old type of metaphysics that had dogmatic “fixed concepts” of the human soul.⁹³ Although Hegel applauds Kant for overcoming such fixed concepts, he attacks him for rejecting the possibility of finding truth in favour of more relativistic categories: ‘[Kant] omits altogether to raise the one question of interest, whether a particular subject, here the *abstract “I” of ordinary thinking* [*Vorstellung*], possesses truth in and for itself. But to cling to phenomena [*Erscheinung*] and the mere conceptions given in everyday consciousness [*Vorstellung*] is to renounce the Notion and philosophy’.⁹⁴ This is also a question of seeing cognition not only as objectivity but also as subjectivity. Lenin takes some of Hegel’s critique down and writes in the margin of his abstract: ‘Kant restricts himself to “phenomena”’.⁹⁵

Lenin skips over, possibly as too idealistic, Hegel’s important reference here to the *Phenomenology*. In this passage Hegel writes of the move from ‘the lowest of the concrete shapes’ of mind toward a concept of ‘Mind that is for itself’.⁹⁶ This leads Hegel in turn to his first articulation of the ‘theoretical Idea, cognition as such’;⁹⁷ which Lenin also skips over. A bit later we will see that this is an important category in the discussion of the idea of cognition, where Hegel will counterpose the theoretical idea to the practical idea. As we will see later, Lenin will give less attention to the theoretical idea and focus instead on the practical idea.

Lenin does pay more attention to the theoretical idea when it is first considered by Hegel as the idea of the true, but without naming it as such in his notes. There, in Hegel’s presentation, its initial, ‘subjective’ form presupposes ‘the negation of the world’, something that he terms only a ‘first negation’.⁹⁸ At this early stage of the theoretical idea, the idea ‘negates’ the world as something it holds to be false, but as noted, Hegel tells us that this is only a first negation. It should be kept in mind that, here and elsewhere, when he refers to the ‘negation of the world’, Hegel is not making a recourse to mysticism but instead articulating two issues: (1) the idea negates and critiques what it holds to be false, and (2) under certain conditions, new ideas overthrow reigning ideologies and thus contribute to the negation of the social status quo.⁹⁹ Lenin takes

93 SL 779.

94 SL 780.

95 CW 38:206.

96 SL 781–82.

97 SL 783.

98 SL 784.

99 We will see in Chapter 8 that Colletti attacks all Hegelianism, including Lenin’s, for defending a notion of the negation of the world by the idea. He ties this to an otherworldly, mys-

this passage down and comments: 'the end of cognition is at first subjective'.¹⁰⁰ Lenin seems, however, to interpret this as a general attack on the theoretical idea rather than on one particular form of it. He misses what Marcuse and others have developed from this in their use of Hegel's concept of the true as a negation of the world in the sense of a radical critique of the actual, historical world as a totality.

Next Lenin records some further critiques Hegel makes of Kant and then sums up what to him is mainly a critique of subjective rather than objective idealism: 'Kant took the finite, transitory, relative, conditional character of human cognition (its categories, causality, etc., etc.) as subjectivism, and not as the dialectics of the Idea (= of nature itself), divorcing cognition from the object'.¹⁰¹ Lenin is once again siding with Hegel against Kant, and especially against relativism, but there is more here. Hegel's critique, here and earlier, of the Kantian focus on phenomena instead of notions will later be used by Lenin to attack other Marxist theorists writing on imperialism, not only reformists such as Hilferding, but even other revolutionaries such as Luxemburg, as we will see in Chapter 5.

6.2 *Analytic and Synthetic Cognition*

Lenin now moves into Hegel's brief discussion of analytical cognition, by which he means higher mathematics. Lenin takes down some of this critique of mathematical theory, including Hegel's attack on some of the premises of Leibniz's differential calculus. In the midst of this discussion, from which he makes excerpts in his abstract, Lenin makes a broad summary of how he sees the relationship of logical categories in Hegel both to Kant and to the material and historical world. His emphasis is on totality and all-sidedness: 'Logical notions are subjective so long as they remain "abstract", in their abstract form, and at the same time express also the thing-in-itself. Nature *and* concreteness *and* abstractness *and* phenomenon *and* essence *and* moment *and* relation. Human cognition is subjective in its abstractness and separateness, but objective as a whole, in the process, in the result, in the tendency, in the source'.¹⁰² Here Lenin has captured for himself (and for us) the Hegelian concept of the 'concrete totality'. For Lenin (in reading Hegel), that means human cognition is 'objective

tical perspective that he argues is the predominant feature of Hegelianism. I will argue that this is a misreading of both Hegel and Lenin.

100 CW 38:206.

101 CW 38:207.

102 CW 38:208.

as a whole ... in the result'. Thus, taken as a whole, over time, ideas both shape and are shaped by history and society. But that is not all.

The other part of Lenin's statement stresses that logical concepts are objective not only when taken as a whole but also 'in the process, in the result, in the tendency, in the source'. Breaking this down a bit further, Lenin now views ideas as possessing objectivity when they are developed not only as a whole, that is, a totality, but also as a process, that is, self-developing rather than static. Objectivity is thus connected to development. This can be seen when we look at the source of ideas, that is, their relationship to a self-development out of a process that began in the past. It can be seen also when we look at ideas as a tendency moving toward a result, that is, by examining the direction toward which their self-development is moving in the future. It is the self-development of ideas that appears to fascinate Lenin as he reads Hegel here. He seems especially interested in Hegel's concept of ideas having results, since for Hegel ideas move in a certain direction.

Lenin skips over most of Hegel's next section, 'Synthetic Cognition', which includes an interesting and characteristically German idealist critique of the essential narrowness of the concept of definition compared to the real content of the object that is to be defined. To Hegel, definitions 'are intended merely to be distinguishing marks for an external reflection': 'According to Blumenbach's observation, for example, the lobe of the ear is absent in all other animals, and therefore ... it could quite properly be used as the distinctive characteristic of physical man. But how inadequate such a completely external determination at once appears when compared with the conception of the total *habitus* of physical man, and with the demand that the notional determination [*Begriffsbestimmung*] shall be something essential!'¹⁰³ Lenin skips over this passage, as well as most of Hegel's critique of the theorem in mathematics and natural science, especially their Newtonian versions.

Lenin does seem to identify, however, with many of Hegel's sharp attacks on the methodology of mathematics, natural science, and formal logic. For example, he takes down Hegel's grand summation of his critique of synthetic cognition, which reads as follows:

The so-called *explanation* and the proof of the concrete brought into theorems turns out to be partly a tautology, partly a confusion of the true relationship, and further, too, a confusion that served to conceal the

103 SL 798.

deception practiced here by cognition, which has taken up empirical data one-sidedly, and only by doing so has been able to obtain its simple definitions and principles; and it obviates any empirical refutation by taking up and accepting as valid the data of experience, not in their concrete totality, but in a particular instance, and that, too, in the direction helpful to its hypothesis and theory. In this subordination of concrete experience to presupposed determinations, the foundation of the theory is obscured and is exhibited only from the side that is conformable to the theory; and in general the unprejudiced examination of concrete observations on their own is made more difficult.¹⁰⁴

Lenin takes down this passage in full and then writes in the margin: 'remarkably correct and profound'.¹⁰⁵ This sharp type of attack on the methodology of natural science and mathematics seems once again to put Lenin's position at variance with that of Engels's *Ludwig Feuerbach*. There, as discussed earlier, Engels argues that the method of natural science is inherently dialectical. In addition, Hegel's statement is also once more at variance with the frequent defense of scientific materialism against idealism in Lenin's own earlier writings.

Hegel's discussion of synthetic cognition is so sharply critical of the methodology of mathematics and natural science, especially Newton's, that even Findlay, who tends to defend Hegel on many issues, writes that in this section, Hegel argues 'strangely'.¹⁰⁶ Nonetheless, Lenin's general identification with Hegel's critique is on more solid footing within the Marxist tradition than might generally be supposed, if one looks at Marx's little-known *Mathematical Manuscripts*. Written in the 1880s but not published until the 1930s, these manuscripts were thus unknown to Lenin. In them, Marx too had strongly identified with Hegel's critique of mathematical method, especially of Newton's differential calculus.¹⁰⁷

Lenin not only identifies with Hegel's argument insofar as certain types of mathematical and natural science proofs and theorems are concerned, but he

104 SL 815. Recently, the American Hegel scholar Terry Pinkard has written on this passage: 'Hegel seems to be expressing the idea, now common among philosophers of science, that there is no theory-independent manner of experimentally testing propositions. It takes a theory to know if the experiment was itself a legitimate one' (Pinkard 1988, p. 77).

105 CW 38:210.

106 Findlay 1958:202.

107 One of the few discussions of this usually neglected issue and its contemporary relevance is found in Brokmeyer 1986.

also sees a relationship to Marx's critique of liberal political economy. For in addition to generally endorsing Hegel's critique, Lenin also writes in the margin next to this long extract from the *Science of Logic*: 'cf. the political economy of the bourgeoisie'.¹⁰⁸ He does not at this point indicate how Hegel's critique could relate to political economy, but several issues are probably involved. Although we cannot be sure of his intent, Lenin may have meant to argue points such as the following: that liberal political economy assumes tautologically the rationality of the market, that it ignores data from experience such as the real conditions of the working people, and further, that it attempts to avoid fundamental debates about the foundation of the theory. Thus, on the one hand, he has tied Hegel's arguments here to a critique of bourgeois political economy. On the other hand, he does not connect Hegel's critique to something that seems more obvious: the scientistic type of Marxism as exemplified by Engels's *Ludwig Feuerbach* and his own *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*. Thus he does not really develop it as an issue within Marxist dialectics.

To sum up briefly where Lenin has gone up to now in his notes on the idea: First, he has embraced the early part of this section as the 'best' exposition of dialectics. Second, he has been impressed by the earthy character of Hegel's *Science of Logic* as exemplified by its chapter on the idea of life and has found materialistic content there. Third, as Hegel has begun to discuss the idea of cognition, Lenin has been sharply critical of various forms of cognition under the idea of the true or the theoretical idea: Kantianism, and then analytic and synthetic cognition. Hegel's critique of the latter two is so sharp, and Lenin reads it so cursorily, that he may have missed an important issue: although Hegel is critiquing the theoretical idea, it is only these particular forms of theory that he is attacking, not the very concept of a theoretical idea. Next Hegel will move to the practical idea, under the heading the idea of the good, the concluding part of the 'Idea of Cognition'. Lenin is even more enthusiastic about Hegel's inclusion of the practical idea at such a high stage of his dialectic than he was, earlier, about the idea of life. Unfortunately, as we will see, Lenin's enthusiasm about the earthy, practical ramifications that he has found in Hegel's text results in a somewhat one-sided reading.

6.3 *The Idea of the Good and the Practical Idea*

This last subsection of the 'Idea of Cognition', entitled the 'Idea of the Good', runs only six pages in Hegel's text, but it is covered at great length by Lenin,

¹⁰⁸ CW 38:210.

and it is here that he also extensively sums up what he has developed from his reading of the *Science of Logic*. Errol Harris gives an indication of some of the background to Hegel's discussion of the idea of the good: 'it may be taken to mean that the fulfillment of the Idea, as self-activating spirit, in its own self-knowledge, is the Good ... One is put to mind of Plato's Idea of the Good, and of Spinoza's teaching that the highest good for man is the perfection of the intellect ... here good is taken simply as the practical end. It is, moreover, also subjective as motive of action, the good conceived as the realisation of the rational ideal – the Kantian good will'.¹⁰⁹ The relationship of the concept of the good to the practical idea, the main topic of this subsection, is never really specified by Hegel in this chapter.

As he begins to read these pages, Lenin is impressed by the transition Hegel makes from synthetic cognition, the last part of the 'Idea of the True', to the idea of the good because it involves the notions of practice and action. At this stage, writes Hegel, the idea 'is the practical Idea, or *action*'.¹¹⁰ Lenin writes in his abstract: 'undoubtedly practice in Hegel stands as a link in the analysis of the process of cognition and transition to the objective ('absolute', according to Hegel) truth. Marx, consequently, clings to Hegel, introducing criteria of practice into the theory of knowledge. Cf. Theses on Feuerbach'.¹¹¹ There are several issues at stake here. First, Lenin once again jumps on and embraces the concepts of practice and action in Hegel. Second, he seems to read Hegel's absolute idea as an idea of objective truth, a reading that seems to downplay the issue of subjectivity.¹¹² Third, Lenin connects Hegel's practical idea, but not his theoretical idea, to Marx's *Theses on Feuerbach*. There, as we saw in Chapter 1, Marx writes in his first thesis that Feuerbach's contemplative materialism lacks both subjectivity and an 'active side'. In that same thesis he writes further that a recourse to elements of idealism can help to overcome this deficiency in Feuerbach's materialism. Finally, in the eleventh and last thesis, Marx, as is better known, says that philosophers need not only to interpret but also to change the world.

109 Harris 1983, p. 285.

110 SL 818.

111 CW 38:212.

112 Here I should note the structure of 'The Doctrine of the Notion' as a whole, where the first section, which includes the chapter on the syllogism, is entitled 'Subjectivity'; the second section, which includes teleology, is entitled 'Objectivity'; and the section Lenin is in now, which includes life, cognition, and the absolute Idea, is entitled 'The Idea'. One problem with Lenin's notes here is that he may be reading all this a bit one-sidedly, as an almost linear progression from subjectivity to objectivity.

In this part of his abstract Lenin once again places long extracts from Hegel on the left side of the page and his own glosses on the right-hand side. His own statement at this point is one of his most far-reaching: 'Man's cognition not only reflects the objective world, but creates it'.¹¹³ Lenin has travelled a very long distance from the crude reflection theory of *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* if he now believes that cognition creates rather than merely reflects the world. Lenin's statement is unquestionably an expression of the unity of idealism and materialism. By cognition here he most surely means not only philosophical or scientific cognition as developed so far by Hegel in the 'Idea of Cognition' but also the type of cognition embodied in revolutionary theory, since that is after all his focus, his aim in reading Hegel. To be sure, this cognition reflects and describes the world, which to Lenin would mean the material and historical world. In addition, however, as Lenin now holds, cognition creates the world. *In many respects, this 'aphorism' is the high point of the entire Hegel Notebooks in terms of Lenin's rethinking and reorganisation of his pre-1914 philosophical categories.*¹¹⁴ From now on, however, he turns back somewhat toward traditional Marxist materialism: in the concluding pages of his 'Abstract of Hegel's *Science of Logic*', he becomes more and more concerned with the issues of practice and materialism, although he does continue to refer to subjectivity.

6.4 *The Practical Idea and Lenin's Omission of the Theoretical Idea*

In general, as he continues in the 'Idea of the Good', Lenin reads Hegel as follows: 'Practice is higher than (theoretical) knowledge, for it has not only the dignity of universality, but also of immediate actuality'.¹¹⁵ He takes down the

¹¹³ CW 38:212.

¹¹⁴ This statement caused difficulty for many years for establishment Soviet philosophers, who were hard-pressed to integrate such 'idealism' into their conception of Lenin as a scientific materialist in the tradition of Engels and Plekhanov. It is without doubt one of the most daring statements in the entire Hegel Notebooks. The main counterargument advanced by Soviet philosophers tended to be that Lenin here was merely summing up Hegel, rather than giving his own views. For an example of these Soviet analyses, see especially Kedrov 1970. As we have seen in the course of examining the notebooks as a whole, however, this proposition becomes increasingly difficult to defend the more one traces Lenin's progress through the whole length of the *Science of Logic*. It is a relatively easy matter to take isolated quotations out of context and argue that these were only notes summarising Hegel, but when the whole is read carefully and without the blinders of official Marxist-Leninist doctrine, it becomes fairly clear that, right from the beginning, Lenin is writing extensive commentary that indicates his attitude to the various points from Hegel's text that he records.

¹¹⁵ CW 38:213.

following passage from Hegel in full: 'In the theoretical Idea the subjective Notion, as the *universal* that *lacks any determination* of its own, stands opposed to the objective world from which it takes to itself a determinate content and filling. But in the practical Idea it is as actual that it confronts the actual; but the certainty of itself which the subject possesses in being determined in and for itself is a certainty of its own actuality and of the *non-actuality* of the world'.¹¹⁶ Lenin appears to read this passage as a move beyond a merely theoretical idea. Hegel's passage is also an extremely idealistic statement, especially in the last part on the nonactuality of the world, which suggests that the practical idea can negate the actual world. As discussed earlier, Hegel's notion of negating the world refers to sharp diremptions in ideas and in society, not a mystical escape from the world.

As he reads further Lenin makes a very close summary of Hegel's statements on practice followed by his own explicit references to revolutionary practice: 'In the Practical Idea (in the sphere of practice) this notion as the actual (acting?) stands opposed to the actual. The self-certainty which the subject (here suddenly instead of 'Notion') has in its being in and for itself, as a determinate subject, is a certainty of its own actuality and of the non-actuality of the world. i.e., that the world does not satisfy man and man decides to change it by his activity'.¹¹⁷ Here Lenin seems to say that the world has a negative value for the human being. Lenin concludes this whole section as follows: 'What is necessary is the union of cognition and practice'.¹¹⁸ There are several issues here. Practice stands opposed to the world of actuality, but not merely quantitatively or materialistically; practice embodied in a live human subject is certain of its own actuality to the point where it negates the existing social world. For Lenin, the context here is obviously social revolution. The key to revolution, however, is not only objective forces but also the development of self-conscious subjectivity aware of its own actuality. Lenin has thus developed a radical concept of subjectivity from his reading of Hegel, carrying him far beyond the scientific and objectivist materialism of the Marxism of the Second International.

He amplifies his point on the importance of subjectivity when he takes down another lengthy passage from Hegel, this one critiquing the stage of the idea of the good as one where 'there are still two worlds in opposition, one a realm of subjectivity in the pure regions of transparent thought, the other a realm of

¹¹⁶ SL 818.

¹¹⁷ CW 38:213.

¹¹⁸ CW 38:216.

objectivity ... that is an undisclosed realm of darkness'.¹¹⁹ Lenin underlines and highlights much of this passage and writes in the margin of his abstract: 'Two worlds: objective and subjective'.¹²⁰ He implies that subjectivity is as important as is objectivity, but he does not seem to grasp that Hegel is making a sharp critique of the practical idea. Instead, as Dunayevskaya argues, Lenin 'felt that the objective, the Practical Idea, is that resolution' of the two worlds of objectivity and subjectivity to which Hegel had pointed.¹²¹

Lenin also fails to take down clear and blunt passages such as the following one a few lines later in Hegel's text, passages that strongly qualify the primacy of the practical idea: 'But what is still lacking in the practical Idea is the moment of consciousness proper itself [*des eigentlichen Bewusstseins selbst*], namely, that the moment of actuality in the Notion should have attained on its own account the determination of *external being*. Another way of regarding this defect is that the *practical* Idea still lacks the moment of the *theoretical* Idea'.¹²² Hegel develops this further, arguing that the idea of the good first needs to return to the idea of the true, the concepts developed in the earlier part of this chapter, where he takes up the theoretical idea. Whereas Lenin stresses the categories of action, practice, and will in his notes on the idea of the good, Hegel here argues in contrary fashion in at least one passage that 'the will [*Wille*] itself ... stands in the way of the attainment of its goal'.¹²³

Lenin skips over most of the passages that either critique the limitations of the practical idea or that stress the importance of the theoretical idea. Although he takes down passages where Hegel critiques the limits of the theoretical idea, he never copies any of Hegel's strong critiques of the practical idea. Next, in a discussion of the 'syllogism of action', Hegel writes: 'In the syllogism of action

119 SL 820.

120 CW 38:215. He once again skips over Hegel's reference in this passage to the *Phenomenology*, however. In this case, Hegel refers readers to the beginning of the chapter in the *Phenomenology* entitled 'Spirit Certain of Itself: Morality', a chapter that directly follows the one where he critiques the French Revolution during the Jacobin phase for its abstract and formalistic Rousseauian concept of freedom. Without dismissing the idea of radical revolution, as have so many conservative critics, Hegel's critique points to the dangers inherent in revolutionary attempts radically to transform society, something from which Lenin and the other Russian revolutionaries might have gained insight. For good discussions of Hegel's critique of the French Revolution, see especially Hyppolite 1969 [1955], and Ritter 1982 [1956].

121 Dunayevskaya 1989 [1973], p. xxxix.

122 SL 821.

123 SL 821.

one premise is the immediate relation of the good end to actuality, which it seizes on and in the second premise directs it as an external means against external actuality'.¹²⁴ After taking down this statement, Lenin makes the following fairly lengthy commentary on the idea of the good as a whole:

The 'syllogism of action'. For Hegel *action*, practice, is the *logical conclusion* of the figure of logic. And this is true! Of course, not in the sense that the figure of logic has by its Otherness in the practice of man (= absolute idealism), but vice versa: the practice of man, repeated billions of times, fastens itself in the consciousness of man by the figures of logic. The figures have the solidity of a prejudice, an axiomatic character precisely (and only) because of this billion times repetition. First postulate: good End (subjective aim) versus actuality ('external actuality'). Second postulate: external means (instrument) (objectivity). Third postulate: namely, the conclusion: the correspondence of subject and object, the verification of subjective ideas, the criteria of objective truth.¹²⁵

Thus, despite some very limited and occasional qualifiers, the categories of action and practice are what Lenin is singling out and summing up for himself as he reads Hegel on the idea of the good.

It is Hegel's concept of the unity of theory and practice, or, as he puts it, of the theoretical and the practical idea, that strikes Lenin as he comes to the end of the 'Idea of the Good'. As always, however, he emphasises only practice. Apparently Lenin is so excited by his discovery that the philosopher of mediation and abstracted human thought is, in his own way, also a philosopher of action that he misses the multi-faceted nature of Hegel's presentation. Lenin is now at the edge of the chapter with which Hegel concludes the *Science of Logic*, the 'Absolute Idea'. He takes down Hegel's preliminary description of the absolute idea: '*cognition* is restored [*hergestellt*] and united with the practical Idea ... but whereas in questing cognition this actuality appeared merely as an objective world without the subjectivity of the Notion, here it appears as an objective world whose inner ground and actual subsistence is the Notion. This is the absolute Idea'.¹²⁶ This statement concludes the 'Idea of the Good'. Lenin's reading of that subsection has led him to several conclusions.

124 SL 821.

125 CW 38:217.

126 SL 823.

Continuing his emphasis on the practical idea, Lenin now notes prominently the fact that Hegel includes it as a major aspect of the absolute idea, which is generally considered to be Hegel's most abstract philosophical category. At the same time, however, he takes down but does not discuss in depth Hegel's opening sentence in the chapter on the absolute idea, a sentence that immediately follows the passage just quoted: 'The Absolute Idea has shown itself to be the identity of the theoretical and the practical Idea. Each of these by itself is still one-sided'.¹²⁷

As we will see, Lenin will also engage in a somewhat restricted reading of the chapter on the absolute idea, ignoring or dismissing some of its key categories, ones that could have become part of his Marxist dialectic as well. This does not negate his achievement, either in this chapter or in the 'Abstract of Hegel's *Science of Logic*' as a whole. Nevertheless, as I will stress later, Lenin did not take account of the fullness of Hegel's dialectic because of his somewhat one-sided preoccupation with the categories of materialism and a materialistic reading of Hegel, on the one hand, and with the categories of action, practice, and will, on the other. From his vantage point of action, practice, and the practical idea, Lenin has read this chapter on the absolute idea 'materialistically'. This has one important merit, however: he will not dismiss the absolute idea as essentially alien to Marxism, as Engels did in *Ludwig Feuerbach*. Thus, Lenin's reading of Hegel will be far richer and more inclusive than that of Engels and his successors in the Second International, such as Plekhanov.

7 The Absolute Idea: The Ambivalent Climax of Lenin's Reading of Hegel

7.1 *Some Perspectives on Hegel's Absolute Idea*

There is no consensus among commentators on what Hegel is doing in the absolute idea chapter. The British empiricist H.B. Acton, who was extremely hostile to Hegel and to dialectic in general, writes with regard to Hegel and the other German idealists: 'It is remarkable that a line of philosophical argument that set out to defend the reality of mind and of freedom should end up with minds that are self-contradictory appearances and an Absolute that alone is free'.¹²⁸ These attacks on the absolute idea are not limited to British empiricists, however. As we saw in Chapter 1, Engels was a student of Hegel's dialectic

¹²⁷ SL 824.

¹²⁸ Acton 1967.

and attempted to develop it for Marxism. Yet he writes that the absolute idea is a place where the most deleterious effects of Hegel's system, as opposed to his method, are at work, creating a dogmatic notion of absolute truth. In a surprisingly similar vein, given his disagreements with Engels, Lukács ties Hegel's absolute idea to religious notions: 'For what forms the conclusion of the system is the repeated self-attainment of the Idea, this time not only as Idea, but simultaneously as its own reality. It is evident that the basic structure of this edifice is strongly reminiscent of the theological system in which God as creator realises the previously worked-out Idea.'¹²⁹ Thus, Engels, Lukács, and Acton tend to regard the absolute idea as a place where absolute truth and theology come to predominate over the critical character of Hegel's dialectic method, despite their very different stances toward Hegel's dialectic.

Marx's own position is, as we have seen, more complicated. In his discussions of Hegel's absolutes in the 1844 *Manuscripts*, he stresses that this part of Hegel's work reveals that what are important for Hegel are only self-consciousness and other mental categories, which for Hegel are the actual essence of human beings. Instead, Marx argues that real, sensuous human existence needs to be made central to the dialectic. At the same time, however, Hegel provides in his absolutes the ground from which such a dialectical humanism can be developed. This new humanism, Marx argues, is the unity of idealism and materialism. Later, in the *Grundrisse* and *Capital*, Marx seems to be working with his own concept of the absolute, whether in seeing human history as a process of the 'absolute movement of becoming' or in his 'absolute general law of capitalist accumulation', whereby capitalism grows and is then torn apart by its internal contradictions.

Findlay's critique is based on his view that Hegel does little more with the absolute idea than recapitulate the dialectical method. This is a disappointment to him, since in his view 'Dialectic is not, however, for Hegel the end of philosophising: it is only a "moment", an aspect in philosophical thinking. If it overcomes the hard-and-fast notions of fixed presuppositions of the Understanding, it must itself be overcome in the higher thought of Reason, or, as Hegel also calls it, speculative thought'.¹³⁰ Findlay thus minimises the importance of dialectic as a category and wishes that it were sublated by reason, a category that he regards as higher and more central. Nevertheless, he also argues forcefully against those who would see retreat from the world in the absolute idea: 'There is no reference here to any absolute, timeless or supra-individual

¹²⁹ Lukács 1978, p. 56.

¹³⁰ Findlay 1958, p. 63.

experience: the Absolute Idea is merely the categorical form of self-conscious Spirit [Mind], something we all exemplify when we admire art, practice religion, or cultivate philosophy. ... With the achievement of the Idea we can become fully conscious of the method we have hitherto followed without being explicitly conscious of it'.¹³¹ Given his privileging of speculative reason over dialectic, however, it is an apparent disappointment to Findlay that 'discussion of method should absorb Hegel's final utterances in the *Logic*'.¹³²

Marcuse's view is different still. On the one hand, he sees some important critical and dialectical features in the absolute idea. On the other hand, he argues, metaphysics and theology ultimately swallow up these elements:

Consequently, Hegel's chapter on the Absolute Idea gives us a final comprehensive demonstration of dialectical method.... The absolute idea is the subject in its final form, thought.... The absolute idea now has to be interpreted as objective being. Hegel's *Logic* thus ends where it began, with the category of being ... At this point Hegel's *Logic* resumes the metaphysical tradition of Western philosophy, a tradition that it had abandoned in so many of its aspects ... In line with this tradition, Hegel too fits his *Logic* with theology.¹³³

In viewing the absolute as a demonstration of the dialectic, Marcuse differs at least in part with Lukács's view that it is as a whole theological.

Dunayevskaya, who has probably devoted more attention than any other recent commentator to Hegel's absolute idea, corresponded extensively with Marcuse on these and other issues.¹³⁴ She has yet another view of what Hegel is doing in this chapter: 'The concrete Universal manifests itself as absolute activity, activity without restriction, either external or internal; for the method is the form of the Absolute Idea, self-movement as method. It allows no opposites merely to coexist peacefully'.¹³⁵ Thus, Hegel's absolute idea is not a resting place for theology or even the resolution of all contradictions but the living, self-negating culmination of his dialectic of self-movement. Contradiction and critique are even more evident here than at earlier stages of the *Science of Logic*: 'The highest contradiction, Hegel reiterates over and over, is in the Absolute itself. From the very first sentence of this final chapter he stresses that

¹³¹ Findlay 1958, p. 267.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Marcuse 1960, pp. 165–7.

¹³⁴ See Anderson 1990, pp. 89–109.

¹³⁵ Dunayevskaya 1989 [1973], p. 29.

the Theoretical and Practical are each “by itself one-sided and contains the Idea itself only as a sought beyond and an unattained goal” ... Precisely where Hegel sounds most abstract, seems to close the shutters tight against the whole movement of history, there he lets the lifeblood of the dialectic – absolute negativity – pour in.¹³⁶ In their correspondence Dunayevskaya repeatedly tries to convince Marcuse of the importance of Hegel's absolutes for contemporary Marxism.

At one point Marcuse responds: ‘But again, although I am trying hard, I cannot see why you need the Absolute Idea in order to demonstrate the Marxian content of self-determination of the Subject, etc. (The very concept of the Absolute Idea is altogether tied to and justifies the separation of material and intellectual productivity at the pretechnological stage.) Certainly you can “translate” also this part of Hegel – but why translate if you can speak the original language?’ Dunayevskaya answers:

I do not agree with you that the Absolute Idea relates to a pre-technological stage. (So long as classes still exist, the dialectic will, and A.I. will forever show new facets.) What I do agree with is that once on the world scale, we have reached the ultimate in technological development, then the responses of the masses in the pre-technological under-developed economies are the spur to seeing something new in the Absolute Idea. Be it backward Ireland in 1916 or backward Russia in 1917, or backward Africa in 1960, somehow that absolute negativity of Hegel comes into play.¹³⁷

They never moved much closer on the issue of Hegel's absolutes, and except for Dunayevskaya's work, it remains an undertheorised topic even within the Hegelian Marxist tradition. As I will discuss later, Lenin tends to view the absolute idea chapter as a final grand exposition of Hegel's revolutionary dialectic rather than as a closure.

7.2 *Lenin Begins the Absolute Idea Chapter*

The chapter on the absolute idea is but twenty pages long, yet despite his earlier admonition to himself that he is avoiding ‘God and the Absolute’, Lenin writes a full twenty pages of notes and commentary on this chapter of Hegel's book. Most of his notes are not direct comments on Hegel's text, however, but rather

¹³⁶ Dunayevskaya 1989 [1973], pp. 31–2.

¹³⁷ These letters are cited and analysed in Anderson 1990. The full correspondence is in the Dunayevskaya 1981–8, pp. 9889–9975.

general summaries of dialectics. But even this is not totally alien to Hegel's chapter, since he himself is summing up his own dialectic there.

Lenin begins by copying the first few lines of this chapter: 'The Absolute Idea has shown itself to be the identity of the theoretical and the practical Idea. Each of these by itself is still one-sided'.¹³⁸ As I already stated, it is this type of unity of theory and practice that attracts Lenin and that he sees as uniting Hegel with Marx, which can be seen in his own summary that follows immediately, where he writes of the 'unity of theoretic ideas (of cognition) and *practice*', placing emphasis on the word *practice*.¹³⁹

He fails to note several passages that seem to have an important bearing on Marxist dialectics, such as the following one: 'The Absolute Idea ... contains within itself the highest degree of opposition. The Notion is not merely *soul*, but free subjective Notion that is for itself and therefore possesses *personality*'.¹⁴⁰ This passage has been singled out by Dunayevskaya, who stresses that Hegel here displays opposition and contradiction within the highest category of the *Science of Logic*. She argues further that Hegel also cautions 'against imposing an old duality on the new unity of opposites', that is, between the theoretical and the practical idea. In addition, she argues, he poses here the issue of the relationship of the individual to the universal.¹⁴¹ Lenin avoids this and many other passages in the absolute idea chapter that speak of free self-development, the individual, and absolute liberation. Dunayevskaya suggests that he does so because he 'didn't have Stalinism to overcome ... transitions, revolutions seemed sufficient to bring the new society. Now everyone looks at the one-party totalitarian state: that is what must be overcome by a totally new revolt in which everyone experiences "absolute liberation"'.¹⁴² Dunayevskaya, who wrote these lines a few weeks after Stalin's death, is concerned with the question of transformed and aborted revolutions, including the Russian Revolution. Lenin in 1914, however, is not terribly preoccupied with this central problem for Marxist dialectics in our age: What happens after the revolution? Is it possible to have a revolution that does not end in totalitarianism?

Lenin does take down and summarise Hegel's statement that 'what remains to be considered' under the absolute idea 'is not a content as such, but the universal aspect of its form – that is, the *method*' (*SL* 825). This is in keeping with the view of Findlay and others that this chapter is devoted mainly to the dia-

138 *SL* 824.

139 *CW* 38:219.

140 *SL* 824.

141 Dunayevskaya 1980, p. 165.

142 'Letters on Hegel's Absolutes of May 12 and 20, 1953', in Dunayevskaya 1989, p. 37.

lectical method. Nonetheless, Lenin skips over Hegel's statement that 'every beginning must be made *with the absolute*, just as all advance is merely the exposition of it'.¹⁴³

A few paragraphs later, however, Lenin stops to go over in great detail one of Hegel's expositions of dialectics as a whole. He takes down, for example, the following passage:

The absolute method, on the contrary, does not behave like external reflection but takes the determinate element from its own subject matter, since it is itself that subject matter's immanent principle and soul. This is what Plato demanded of cognition, that it should *consider things in and for themselves*, that is, should consider them partly in their universality, but also that it should not stray away from them catching at circumstances, examples and comparisons, but should keep before it solely the things themselves and bring before consciousness what is immanent in them.¹⁴⁴

When Lenin writes down the phrase 'absolute method' in his abstract, he puts next to it in brackets: 'i.e., the method of cognition of objective truth'.¹⁴⁵ This is, as I remarked earlier, a rather restricted reading of absolute method, one that stresses only objectivity and not subjectivity, for example.

After copying this passage, Lenin adds in his notes: 'The method "of absolute cognition" is analytic ... "but no less synthetic"'.¹⁴⁶ Apparently the passage that follows almost immediately in Hegel's text is very important to him, for he takes it down first in German and then translates it into Russian: 'This no less synthetic than analytic moment of the judgement, by which the universal of the beginning of its own accord determines itself as the other of itself, is to be named the dialectical moment'.¹⁴⁷ Lenin writes next to this in the margin: 'One of the definitions of dialectics'.¹⁴⁸ In the previously cited passages that begin with the discussion of absolute method, Hegel is developing his notion of the need for an immanent rather than an external stance toward the subject matter of philosophy. He is also recollecting some of the earlier categories of the *Science of Logic*, such as synthetic and analytic cognition as well as judg-

143 SL 829.

144 SL 830.

145 CW 38:220.

146 CW 38:220.

147 SL 831.

148 CW 38:220.

ment. Finally, he is defining the dialectical moment as one that flows out of the unity of synthetic and analytic cognition and that is at the same time self-determining. Thus, dialectic possesses the subjectivity lacking in the moments of synthetic or analytic cognition. But Lenin does not discuss these issues directly.

7.3 'Elements of Dialectics'

Suddenly, before taking down Hegel's comments that follow immediately on the development of dialectics from the Greeks through Kant, Lenin's abstract opens into his own lengthy definitions of dialectics. First he gives a three-point version as an attempt to clarify the previously cited passages from Hegel and then a sixteen-point one. The first, briefer one reads: '1) The determination of the concept out of itself [the thing *itself* must be considered in its relations and in its development]; 2) the contradictory nature of the thing itself (the other of itself), the contradictory forces and tendencies in each phenomenon; 3) the union of analysis and synthesis. Such, apparently, are the elements of dialectics'.¹⁴⁹ Here he has captured the notions of immanent development, of contradiction, and part of what Hegel is doing with analysis and synthesis, but there is no real concept of a self-developing subject, which is also central to Hegel's text.

Evidently Lenin is still not satisfied. He begins a sixteen-point exposition, also entitled 'Elements of dialectics', much of which does not seem to be directly related to the previously cited passages from Hegel's text. It is better viewed as more of a general summation. This is Lenin's most extensive systematic statement on dialectics in the entire 'Abstract of Hegel's *Science of Logic*'. I will begin by quoting it in its entirety:

We can, if you please, present these elements of the dialectic in a more detailed way, thus: 1) The *objectivity* of the analysis (not examples, not digression, but the thing itself). 2) The whole totality of the manifold *relations* of this thing to the others. 3) The *development* of this thing (respective appearance), its own movement, its own life. 4) The internally contradictory *tendencies* (and sides) of this thing. 5) The thing (the appearance, etc.) as sum and *unity of opposites*. 6) The *struggle*, respectively unfolding, of these opposites, the contradictions of the impulses, etc. 7) The unity of analysis and synthesis – disintegration of the particular parts of the totality, the summation of these parts together. 8) The relation of

149 CW 38:221.

each thing (appearance, etc.) is not only manifold but general, universal. Each thing (appearance, process, etc.,) is connected with *every* other. 9) Not only unity of opposites but *transitions of every* determination, quality, characteristic, side, feature into every other (into its opposite). 10) Infinite process of unfolding of *new* sides, relations, etc. 11) Infinite process of the deepening of man's cognition of things, appearances, processes, etc., from appearance to essence, and from the less profound to the more profound essence. 12) From coexistence to causality and from one form of connection and of mutual dependence to another, deeper and more universal. 13) The repetition at a higher stage of certain features, characteristics, etc., of the lower, and 14) the apparent return to the old (*the negation of the negation*). 15) The struggle of the content with the form and the reverse. The shedding of the form, the transformation of the content. 16) The *transition* of quantity into quality and *vice versa*. ((15 and 16 are examples of 9)) Briefly the dialectic can be defined as the doctrine of the unity of opposites. Thereby is the kernel of the dialectic grasped, but that demands explanation and development.¹⁵⁰

Here we have arrived at a core statement of Lenin's concept of the dialectic, written after he has finished most of the *Science of Logic*. I want now to discuss these sixteen points in detail.

First, in one through five Lenin discusses the Hegelian concept of concrete totality at various levels. Totality has a quantitative aspect, as for Hegel and Lenin it must have to be all-embracing and show 'the manifold relations of this thing to the others' (point two). It is not, however, static or motionless, like a photograph. Rather it is in a process of movement, of immanent self-development, with 'its own movement, its own life' (point three). This multifaceted, self-developing totality is not a unanimity, however, but rather a sum of different entities and impulses, a 'unity of opposites' (point five). It includes 'internally contradictory tendencies (and sides)' (point four). It is probably mainly Hegel's concepts from 'The Doctrine of Essence' of identity and difference that are being evoked in point five as the 'unity of opposites'. For Hegel, it is a key element of the dialectic.

Second, having shown that the 'concrete totality' is really a 'unity of opposites', Lenin proceeds to draw out a notion he calls the 'struggle ... of these opposites' (point six). He probably develops this notion from the Hegelian concept of contradiction, also in 'The Doctrine of Essence'. Even so, at the point of the

150 CW 38:221-3.

struggle between opposites, there are still unities and relationships binding the struggling 'opposites' together: 'Each thing ... is connected with every other' (point eight). This is looking at the unity of opposites from the other end, from the standpoint of the concept of contradiction.

Third, Lenin discusses the Hegelian concept of transition and develops the concept he articulated earlier: transformation into opposite. The struggle of opposites is not circular within a closed universe, like the change of seasons, but a *development* through contradiction. It is a struggle of opposites where one side wins out over another and creates a transition to a newer and more developed form. This new form in turn commences to have its own contradictions, which are not a return to the past but opposition at a different and higher level. The new determination undergoes a transformation 'into its opposite' (point nine). Things are ceaselessly transforming themselves into their opposites while at the same time remaining part of an interconnected whole.

Fourth, all these transformations are part of an 'infinite process of unfolding of new sides, relations, etc.' (point ten). These include 'the struggle of the content with the form and the reverse' (point fifteen) and the 'transition of quantity into quality and vice versa (point sixteen). Some of this is connected to human cognition and theoretical knowledge: 'Infinite process of the deepening of man's cognition of things ...' (point eleven), but this point is developed weakly.

Lenin's point fourteen, on the 'negation of the negation', which is limited to the notion of the 'apparent return to the old', is the most problematic of all. Here Lenin has truncated one of Hegel's key dialectical concepts beyond recognition, the very one that Marx considered to be the driving force in Hegel's dialectic. The philosopher Louis Dupré writes that in this passage, Lenin's interpretation of Hegel 'cannot be justified'¹⁵¹ because there is no reason that a double negation would necessarily lead one back to one's starting point. Another idea that is only weakly developed in these sixteen points is the concept of subjectivity, especially the self-developing, self-conscious subject.

Taken as a whole, many of Lenin's sixteen points are so general that they could apply to inanimate objects as easily as to human beings and thus seem to be an attempt to create an overly formalistic definition of dialectic. It should also be noted that Lenin makes no mention of subjectivity in his sixteen points, leaving his definition open to Hegel's own critique of definitions a bit earlier in the *Science of Logic*: that they are usually overly formalistic and lack a real

¹⁵¹ Dupré 1977, p. 678. This probing and original article sheds much light on the Hegel-Marx relationship. Dupré's argument on Lenin, Hegel, and Marx also appears in a slightly different form in Dupré 1983.

content. Although they certainly constitute one of Lenin's core statements on the dialectic, these sixteen points should not, therefore, be considered the high point of his abstract. Some of the most creative dialectical elements in Lenin's Hegel Notebooks are to be found, as we have seen, in notes and commentary scattered throughout his abstract. There is no evidence that this summation is the product of his having reviewed all his notes up to that point. Nor are they the end of his abstract.

7.4 *The Negation of the Negation*

After he lists his sixteen points, Lenin resumes quoting the entire passage from Hegel where he left off. As discussed previously, in the rest of the passage Hegel traces the history of dialectics all the way from the Greeks to Kant. Lenin is especially interested in Hegel's refutation of accusations that the ability to use dialectics 'rests on a subjective talent'¹⁵² or on 'the trick of an illusive show'¹⁵³ and of the charge that 'dialectic has only a negative result'.¹⁵⁴ He also expresses interest in Hegel's critique of sophistry and scepticism.

Here Lenin also begins to come to grips more than before with Hegel's concept of the negation of the negation. Lenin quotes a passage from Hegel on negation and writes in the margin: 'this is very important for understanding dialectics'. Part of this passage reads: 'To hold fast to the positive in its negative, in the content of the presupposition, in the result, this is the most important feature in rational cognition'.¹⁵⁵ Here Hegel is giving an overview of the negation of the negation, where the second negation becomes the 'positive in the negative'. After recording this, Lenin writes: 'Not empty negation, not futile negation, not *sceptical negation*, vacillation and doubt is characteristic and essential in the dialectic – which, undoubtedly, contains in itself the element of negation and indeed as its most important element – no, but negation as a moment of connection, as a moment of development, retaining the positive, i.e., without any vacillation, without any eclecticism'.¹⁵⁶ Dupré argues that here, Lenin has 'understood [the] dual nature of the second negation' in Hegel, a negation that 'includes, in fact, a positive aspect as well as a negative one'.¹⁵⁷ Lenin now sees the negation of the negation as a 'moment of development', of forward movement rather than, as earlier in his sixteen points, as a mere 'return to the old'. He

152 SL 831.

153 SL 832.

154 SL 832.

155 SL 834.

156 CW 38:226.

157 Dupré 1977, p. 675.

expands this a bit further: 'Dialectics consists in general in the negation of the first proposition, in its replacement by a second (in the transition of the first into the second, in the demonstration of the connection of the first with the second, etc.). The second can be made the predicate of the first'.¹⁵⁸ Here Lenin has traced for himself the way in which Hegel outlines the process by which his concept of negation moves through a process of negation of the negation to a positive, forward movement. In the margin of his notebooks alongside this statement, Lenin writes, 'very important for understanding dialectics'.

Now Lenin goes on to copy a lengthy critique of formalistic theorising, ending with the following passage from Hegel: 'But formal thinking makes identity its law, and allows the contradictory content before it to sink into the sphere of ordinary conception, into space and time, in which the contradictories are held asunder in juxtaposition and temporal succession and so come before consciousness without mutual content'.¹⁵⁹ At this point he also takes issue with Hegel a bit, the only time he does so in the entire concluding chapter on the absolute idea. He accuses Hegel of having 'allowed the ass's ears, idealism[,] to show themselves – by referring [to] time and space ... [as] something lower compared with thought'.¹⁶⁰ As soon as he has finished attacking Hegel's idealism, he adds: 'Incidentally, ... sensuous representation is in a sense lower' (CW 38:228) than thought. This latter remark indicates as well some identification with Hegel's point.

Then Lenin takes down another of Hegel's important statements on the negation of the negation: 'Now the negativity just considered constitutes the turning point of the movement of the Notion ... for on this subjectivity alone rests the sublation of the opposition between Notion and reality, and the unity that is truth. The *second* negative, the negative of the negative, at which we have arrived, is ... the *innermost, most objective moment* of life and spirit, through which a subject, a person, a free being, exists'.¹⁶¹ He writes for himself the following summary of this passage: 'Important here is: 1) the characterisation of dialectics: self-movement, source of activity, movement of life and spirit; correspondence of notions of the subject (man) with reality; 2) objectivism to the highest degree ('the most objective moment')'.¹⁶² Here, in the absolute idea chapter, Lenin seems to have caught the negation of the negation as a notion of self-movement, but he has only belatedly noted a category that Hegel has used

158 CW 38:226.

159 SL 835.

160 CW 38:228.

161 SL 835–6.

162 CW 38:229.

from 'The Doctrine of Being' onward. Another problematic feature of Lenin's reading of this passage is that his stress on objectivism in his second point obscures what is arguably the most important new feature here, Hegel's concluding phrase 'a subject, a person, a free being'. The notions of 'person' and 'free being' are apparently abstract to him. In general, as we have seen earlier, Lenin does not easily take over Hegel's concepts of freedom or individual self-development.

Lenin continues to quote extensively from the last six pages of the *Science of Logic*, singling out, for example, the following passage for special emphasis: 'The richest is therefore the most concrete and most subjective, and that which withdraws itself into the simplest depth is the mightiest and most all-embracing'.¹⁶³ Thus, he does seem also to identify with Hegel's concept of subjectivity, despite all his talk about the absolute idea as an embodiment of objective truth. Once again, however, he has difficulty connecting subjectivity to freedom and individual self-development. Thus, he skips over the sentence immediately following in Hegel's text, a sentence that stresses human personality and human freedom: 'The highest, most concentrated point is the *pure personality* which, solely through the absolute dialectic which is its nature, no less *embraces and holds everything within itself*, because it makes itself the supremely free – the simplicity which is the first immediacy and universality'.¹⁶⁴ It is certainly arguable that had Lenin had access to Marx's *1844 Manuscripts*, with their strong evocation of individual as well as social self-development, he would not so easily have shied away from such expressions of Hegel.

7.5 *Hegel 'Stretches a Hand to Materialism': The Transition from Logic to Nature*

Lenin ends his notes from the *Science of Logic* with the following quotation on the relationship of the idea to nature: 'The Idea, namely, in positing itself as absolute *unity* of the pure Notion and its reality and thus contracting itself into the immediacy of *being*, is the totality in this form – *Nature*'.¹⁶⁵ Then he writes that this has a close relation to materialism: 'This sentence on the last page of the *Logic* is extraordinarily remarkable. The transition of the Logical Idea to *Nature*. Stretches a hand to materialism. Engels was right when he said that Hegel's system is materialism turned upside down. This is not the last sentence of the *Logic*, but what comes after it to the end of the page is unimportant. End

¹⁶³ SL 841.

¹⁶⁴ SL 841.

¹⁶⁵ SL 843.

of the *Logic*. December 17, 1914'.¹⁶⁶ In the margin, he writes: 'In the smaller logic ... the last phrase of the book is: "but this Idea which has Being is Nature"'.¹⁶⁷ Lenin here gives us the date when he finished the *Science of Logic*, 17 December 1914, which is before 4 January 1915, when, as discussed earlier, he writes to the *Granat Encyclopedia* requesting that he be allowed to add something to the section on dialectics in his article on Marx. Lenin's Hegel studies continue, however, with an additional four pages of notes from the *Encyclopedia Logic*, apparently added after 17 December.

There are several important theoretical issues here, as Lenin comes to the end of the *Science of Logic*. First, he is stressing the transition from logic to nature, seeing a relationship there to a transition to materialism. He leaves out the rest of the page of Hegel's text as 'unimportant'.¹⁶⁸ Is it really so unimportant? Let me quote the essential parts from Hegel's conclusion that Lenin has decided are unimportant:

The Idea, namely, in positing itself as absolute *unity* of the pure Notion and its reality and thus contracting itself into the immediacy of *being*, is the *totality* in this form – *nature*. But this determination has not *issued from a process of becoming*, nor is it a *transition*, as when above, the subjective Notion in its totality *becomes objectivity* and the *subjective end becomes life*. On the contrary, the pure Idea in which the determinateness or reality of the Notion is itself raised into Notion, is an absolute *liberation* [*Befreiung*] for which there is no longer any immediate determination that is not equally *posited* and itself Notion; in this freedom, therefore, no transition takes place ... the Idea *freely releases* itself in its absolute self-assurance and inner poise. By reason of this freedom, the form of its determinateness is also utterly free ... the Notion ascends as a free Existence that has withdrawn into itself from externality, that completes its self-liberation in the *science of mind* [*Geistes*] and that finds the supreme Notion of itself in the science of logic as the self-comprehending pure Notion.¹⁶⁹

The shorter *Encyclopedia Logic*, on which Lenin seems to rely for part of his interpretation of the transition to nature as connected to materialism, does

166 CW 38:234.

167 CW 38:234.

168 CW 38:234.

169 SL 843–4.

not include these arguments, which form the concluding sentences of the *Science of Logic*.

Although this passage is a difficult one, it is fairly clear from even a cursory reading that in the last sentence, Hegel is referring to a transition not only to nature but also to mind, where the notion 'completes its self-liberation'. As we have seen, Lenin refers only to nature, not to mind. Lenin's argument that Hegel's transition to nature can be interpreted by Marxists as one to materialism is tenable, and also highly interesting, if it is not posed one-sidedly. When Hegel's transition to mind is also considered, however, the conclusion of the *Science of Logic* seems to have even stronger idealistic overtones. If we accept for a moment Lenin's interpretation of nature as materialism, then the transition to mind could be interpreted as involving idealism, and in this sense we would be dealing with two moments of the dialectic, idealism and materialism. A unity of idealism and materialism is in fact what was posed by the young Marx in his 'Critique of the Hegelian Dialectic', which was devoted mainly to the *Phenomenology*, as we saw in Chapter 1. Lenin, in avoiding Hegel's concluding passage on mind, makes it all that much easier for us not to return to the perspectives of the young Marx but instead to be thrown back to Engels's far narrower concept of materialism. As we have already seen, this is also what Lenin refers to directly when he discusses the transition from logic to mind: Engels's notion that 'Hegel is materialism turned upside down'.

Marcuse has also stressed the transition to nature at the end of the *Science of Logic*, arguing that it represents 'an actual process in reality', although he does not tie it so directly to materialism as does Lenin. Like Lenin he gives most of his emphasis to the transition to nature. Marcuse also writes, however, that the rest of Hegel's paragraph, the part that Lenin does not quote, 'offers great difficulties' because of the dual transition, which goes not only to nature, but also to mind.¹⁷⁰ It is here, writes Marcuse, that Hegel's *Science of Logic* returns to metaphysics, ontology, and even theology.

As I read him, however, Hegel is talking not so much about theology in these last sentences of his work as about self-liberation, something that could be related to Marxist dialectics. That is the view also of Dunayevskaya, who interprets the last lines of Hegel's *Science of Logic* not as a flight into theology or mystical idealism but as a dialectic of freedom and criticises Lenin for skipping over them.¹⁷¹

170 Marcuse 1960, p. 166.

171 On this point see Dunayevskaya 1989 [1973]. This issue is discussed more in Chapter 8.

7.6 *Lenin's Final Overview of the Science of Logic*

As Lenin continues his notes, he gives a very interesting overview of Hegel's discussion of the absolute idea: 'It is noteworthy that the whole chapter on the "Absolute Idea" scarcely says a word about God (hardly ever has a "divine" "notion" slipped out accidentally) and apart from that – *this NB* – it contains almost nothing that is specifically *idealism*, but has for its main subject the *dialectical method*. The sum-total, the last word and essence of Hegel's logic is the *dialectical method* – this is extremely noteworthy. And one thing more: in this *most idealistic* of Hegel's works there is the *least* idealism and the *most materialism*. "Contradictory", but a fact!"¹⁷² As I pointed out previously, Lenin reads the absolute idea chapter selectively, yet he also appears to take it extremely seriously as a foundation for Marxist dialectics. First of all, it hardly mentions God. This is evidently a surprise to him, since he has from the beginning of his abstract stressed that he was leaving aside God and the absolute. Second, like Findlay, Marcuse, Dunayevskaya, and others, he has recognised that this chapter is mainly an exposition of the dialectical method. We have here yet another indication that Lenin has come some distance from Engels's view that the absolute idea is where Hegel's system swallows up the revolutionary character of his dialectical method.

Third, he finds nothing specifically idealist about the overall exposition of dialectics in the absolute idea chapter, and in the *Science of Logic* as a whole he finds 'the least idealism and the most materialism'. This contrasts sharply, as we have seen, with the stance of Lukács, who dismisses the absolute idea as tending toward the theological, and even that of Marcuse, who sees it as concluding with ontology and theology, despite what he sees as its fine exposition of dialectics. Lenin's assessment of the absolute idea chapter is probably closer to the stance of Dunayevskaya, although as was already mentioned, she is both indebted to and critical of what Lenin does with Hegel's absolute idea.

Lenin writes four more pages of notes, based on the last pages of the *Encyclopedia Logic*, from Hegel's discussion of the will and the absolute idea. In this work, Lenin notes, Hegel gives a different title to his discussion of the idea of the good: 'Willing' [*Wollen*].¹⁷³ As I will show in Chapter 8, Dunayevskaya argues that this section on will reinforces Lenin's tendency to read Hegel's practical idea one-sidedly, in a manner that stresses action and will and not the moment of the theoretical idea.

¹⁷² CW 38:234.

¹⁷³ CW 38:236.

I can now state briefly some of the main concepts Lenin has worked out from his reading of Hegel's *Science of Logic*: (1) self-development through contradiction, (2) leaps versus evolutionary gradualism, (3) the unity of opposites, (4) the transformation into opposite, (5) the unity of idealism and materialism, (6) on many occasions, the centrality of subjectivity to dialectics, (7) the notion of action, practice, and will as being equally as important as, if not more important than, the theoretical idea, (8) cognition as both reflecting and shaping the world, (9) Hegel's concept of nature as related to materialism, (10) the critique of vulgar materialism, and (11) at the end of his study, a bit on the negation of the negation. Lenin tends to ignore or downplay greatly the following Hegelian categories, all of which could have been connected to a Marxist dialectic of liberation: (1) mind or spirit, (2) until the very end, the negation of the negation, (3) free self-development, (4) the one-sidedness of the practical idea without the theoretical idea, and (5) individual self-development. Nonetheless, he has made an extraordinarily important study of the *Science of Logic*.

Even the Polish philosopher Leszek Kolakowski, hardly an admirer of Lenin's theorising, concedes that the Hegel Notebooks 'suggest an interpretation of Hegelianism that is less simplified than Engels's. The dialectic is not merely an assertion that "everything changes", but an attempt to interpret human knowledge as a perpetual interplay between subject and object, in which the question of the "absolute primacy" of either loses its sharpness'.¹⁷⁴ It has been a rich source for subsequent Marxist and radical theory. The 'Abstract of Hegel's *Science of Logic*' shows Lenin to have been the first Hegelian Marxist of the twentieth century, one who helped pave the way for later critical and dialectical theorists such as Gramsci, Lukács, Korsch, Marcuse, Lefebvre, Bloch, and Dunayevskaya. In the next chapter I will explore his continuing writings on dialectics from 1915 to 1923.

¹⁷⁴ Kolakowski 1978, p. 464.

Lenin's Discussions of the Dialectic, 1915–23: An Ambivalent, Secretive Hegelianism

In this chapter I follow further the process of Lenin's encounter with Hegel, an encounter that continued from 1915 to his death in 1924. I will take up other parts of the 1914–15 Hegel Notebooks, especially his 1915 notes on Hegel's *History of Philosophy* and *Philosophy of History*. I will also look at his essay fragment 'On the Question of Dialectics' (1915) and a few other shorter texts in the Hegel Notebooks. This will round out the discussion of the Hegel Notebooks. Next I will examine Lenin's discussions of Hegel and dialectics in his published writings and speeches after 1914. I will emphasise two issues: (1) basic conceptual statements on Marxist dialectics or (2) explicit references to Hegel or dialectics. Before beginning this discussion of Lenin's further work on Hegel and dialectics from 1915 on, however, I will glance briefly at his political writings in 1914–15 to show better the immediate context of his Hegel Notebooks.

1 Interlude: Writings on the War and Revolutionary Defeatism, 1914–15

As published in the English edition of Lenin's *Collected Works*, during the period from August through December 1914 Lenin's writings consist mainly of the following items: 'Abstract of Hegel's *Science of Logic*' (150 pages), an essay on Karl Marx for the *Granat Encyclopedia* (50 pages), and political writings on World War I (50 pages). This is a rather surprising balance of theoretical versus more political writings for a Marxist who is usually regarded as primarily an organisation man rather than a theorist.

From practically the very first day of the war, Lenin began to elaborate his concept of 'revolutionary defeatism'. On 24 August 1914, he wrote in an unpublished article: 'From the viewpoint of the working class and the toiling masses of all the peoples of Russia, the defeat of the Tsarist monarchy and its army, which oppress Poland, the Ukraine, and many other peoples so as to increase Great-Russian oppression of the other nationalities, and consolidate the reactionary and barbarous government of the Tsar's monarchy, would be the lesser evil by far'.¹

1 CW 21:18.

Extending the argument outside Russia, Lenin in another article from the same period states: 'The Russian Social-Democrats were right in saying that to them the defeat of tsarism was the lesser evil ... in each country the socialists (who are not opportunists) ought to see their main enemy in their "own" ("homemade") chauvinism'.² Here we see Lenin for the first time beginning to view himself as a leader not only of Russian Marxism but also of world Marxism.³ He is actually claiming that the Bolsheviks had lessons to give, not only to other East Europeans such as Luxemburg's Polish Marxist party or the Mensheviks, but also to the major grouping in world Marxism at that time: the German Social Democracy.

On 1 November 1914, the Bolshevik exile newspaper *Sotsial-Demokrat* published Lenin's article 'The Position and Tasks of the Socialist International'. This was his first public bid for a leading position in world Marxism. It includes for the first time the concept of 'turning the imperialist war into a civil war', which was to distinguish Lenin's Marxism during the period 1914–17 and separate him even from other revolutionary opponents of that war.⁴ In that article Lenin writes: 'The bourgeoisie is duping the masses by disguising imperialist rapine with the old ideology of a "national war". This deceit is being shown up by the proletariat, which has brought forward its slogan of turning the imperialist war into a civil war'.⁵ As is well known, this position was so uncompromising, so far to the left, that many other revolutionary opponents of the war did not go along with it, including some Bolsheviks, such as Lev Kamenev.⁶

The theoretical and political arguments around these questions, however, did not come to be fully developed by Lenin until 1915, after he had completed his Hegel studies. The first detailed elaboration of his antiwar views is

² *CW* 21:22–3.

³ It is true that as early as the 1907 Stuttgart Congress of the Second International, Lenin, together with Luxemburg, Trotsky, and Plekhanov, had successfully put forward an important antiwar resolution. But this type of direct involvement in arguing for specific issues at an international socialist congress was unusual for Lenin before 1914. For example, he refrained from criticising the orthodox German socialist leaders Kautsky and August Bebel, even after they were accused by Luxemburg of having softened their stance toward imperialism after 1910.

⁴ In a subtle and probing analysis, the French historian Georges Haupt writes in his article 'War and Revolution in Lenin', in Haupt 1986 [1971], that the point of Lenin's famous slogan, 'turn the imperialist war into a civil war' (*CW* 21:39), was not siding with the enemy of one's own country but rather revolutionary intransigence. Haupt also takes note of Lenin's Hegel studies during this period and argues that Lenin's concept of dialectic was 'one of a concrete totality which took account of every trend in each given situation' (151).

⁵ *CW* 21:39.

⁶ For background and chronology see especially Service 1991, and Senn 1971.

in the unpublished twenty-page article 'Under a False Flag', written in February 1915, two months after he had written his 'Abstract of Hegel's *Science of Logic*' and during his study of other works by Hegel. There he begins to develop his concept of a labour aristocracy that was to be so crucial to his later theory of imperialism: 'The enjoyment of crumbs of advantage from the colonies, from privileges, by an insignificant minority of the working class in Britain, for instance, is an established fact, recognised and pointed out by Marx and Engels. Formerly confined to Britain alone, this phenomenon became common to all the great capitalist countries of Europe, as their colonial possessions expanded, and in general as the imperialist period of capitalism grew and developed'.⁷ This unpublished article also includes explicitly Hegelian language, apparently drawn from his 'Abstract of Hegel's *Science of Logic*', as in a passage where Lenin writes that the development of imperialism led to 'an entire opportunist trend based on a definite stratum within present-day democracy, and linked with the bourgeoisie of its own national "shade" by numerous ties of common economic, social and political interests – a trend directly, openly, consciously and systematically hostile to any idea of a "break in gradualness"'.⁸ Here, the Hegelian phrase 'break in gradualness' refers to the possibility of a revolutionary transformation.

This was all part of Lenin's argument against more than just pro-war elements within international socialism or those he regarded as little better, such as Kautsky, who wrote during the same period in support of national defence: 'every country and the proletariat of every country have an urgent interest in preventing their country's enemies from crossing its borders, thus preventing the horrors and devastation of war in its most terrible form, that of enemy invasion. In every national state, the proletariat too must use all its energy to preserve intact the independence and unity of its national area'.⁹ Lenin's revolutionary intransigence, however, meant a sharp separation not only from Kautsky but even from other revolutionary socialists who did oppose the war, such as Trotsky, who wrote of 'peace without annexations' without explicitly calling for civil war.

Underlying this attitude of extreme revolutionary intransigence¹⁰ was not only Lenin's personality and his revolutionary past but also his Hegel studies,

7 CW 21:152.

8 CW 21:153.

9 Kautsky 1983, p. 94.

10 As Haupt shows, however, this did not mean an 'immediate' call for a revolutionary uprising, which would have been totally unrealistic in 1914–15, when patriotic sentiment among the working class remained high. Haupt writes that every 'serious analysis', including

for in those studies he explored concepts of leaps and breaks in gradualness, and also of self-development. It should be kept in mind that his 1914–15 studies of dialectics seem to have influenced his better-known articles on the war and on revolutionary defeatism. Later, I will explore the extent to which Lenin's changed view of Hegel and of the dialectics of revolution also shaped his subsequent and major theoretical studies of imperialism, national liberation, and the state and revolution, written mainly in 1916 and 1917.

Before continuing with an examination of Lenin's Hegel studies, however, it is necessary to underline the central place of politics in his life and work. Being the political animal that he was, Lenin would hardly have engaged in Hegel studies as totally separate from his political life. Nor could a philosophical issue alone have been a determinant of his theoretical-political direction. It could certainly be argued that when Plekhanov, still the chief Russian Marxist philosopher of the time, adopted a pro-Allied stance, his position undoubtedly enhanced Lenin's desire to work out his own alternative concept of Marxist dialectics.¹¹ Thus, it is a question not of Hegel studies 'causing' Lenin's concept of revolutionary defeatism or any of his other political and economic concepts after 1914 but of exploring how these studies affected and were affected by Lenin's political career as a revolutionary.

2 Notes on Other Works by Hegel, 1915: Intelligent Idealism versus Vulgar Materialism

The most substantial part of Lenin's Hegel Notebooks besides the 'Abstract of Hegel's *Science of Logic*' is the nearly sixty pages of notes he wrote in 1915 on Hegel's three-volume *History of Philosophy*. Lenin's notes cover only about the first half of this massive work. He takes notes on Hegel's discussion of ancient Greek philosophy, but these notes end before Hegel comes to medieval and modern philosophy. These notes are not only shorter than those on the *Science of Logic*, but they also tend more toward straight summary. Nonetheless,

Lenin's, excluded the 'hypothesis' of 'revolution as an immediate socialist response to the outbreak of a war' (Haupt 1986, p. 141). This was because the immediate effect of mobilisation for war was the undermining of socialist and oppositional organisations. Only as the war dragged on, and disillusionment set in, did the actual call for a revolutionary uprising become more practical.

11 In fact, Guy Planty-Bonjour (1974) goes so far as to suggest that Lenin's 1914–15 critiques of Plekhanov on dialectics were really based on these differences over the war rather than on genuinely philosophical disagreements. For a critique of Planty-Bonjour's position, see Chapter 8.

they contain some very important observations on Hegelian dialectics, in some cases extending even further what Lenin had written on the *Science of Logic*. Since the *History of Philosophy*, compiled from Hegel's students' lecture notes a decade after his death, is not a fundamental Hegelian text on the level of the *Science of Logic*, my comments below will focus more on Lenin's general statements on dialectics, leaving aside for the most part a detailed analysis of how he was reading Hegel's text on Greek philosophy.

Lenin notes that for Hegel, the Eleatic school marked the beginning of dialectics, and in his own summary remarks he stresses once again the category of contradiction: 'Dialectics in the proper sense is the study of contradiction *in the very Essence of objects*: not only are Appearances transitory, mobile, fluid, demarcated only by conventional boundaries, but the *Essence* of things is so as well'.¹² Whereas most of his Marxist contemporaries, following Engels, emphasised that the key distinction is between appearance and underlying essence – that is, that capitalism is in essence exploitive despite its appearance of free labor and free competition – Lenin seems here to be drawing from his reading of 'The Doctrine of the Notion' in the *Science of Logic*, where, as we saw in the previous chapter, Hegel argued that the notional dialectic of self-movement and self-development transcends not only being but also essence.

Lenin also takes issue once again with Hegel's idealism at the point where the latter critiques the early Greek atomist Leucippus. Apparently feeling an affinity to what he perceives as Leucippus's materialism, Lenin writes of Hegel's critique: 'Hegel's logic cannot be applied in its given form, it cannot be taken as given. One must separate out from it the logical (epistemological) nuances, after purifying them from the mysticism of ideas [*Ideenmystik*]: that is still a big job'.¹³ He refers at this point to what he terms 'Hegel's blindness, the one-sidedness of the Idealist!!'.¹⁴ I read these strictures against Hegel as applying fairly narrowly to Hegel's critique of the Greek atomists rather than to Hegel's dialectical logic in general because Lenin's subsequent comments in the same set of notes are not at all dismissive of Hegel. Thus, it seems that for Lenin, it is only in this specific instance, Hegel's critique of the Greek atomists, that Hegel's logic cannot be applied in its given form.

Althusser has given these statements more weight, viewing them as a general repudiation of Hegel.¹⁵ Althusser's argument is undermined by the following

¹² CW 38:251–2.

¹³ CW 38:264.

¹⁴ CW 38:265.

¹⁵ For more discussion of Althusser's position, see Chapter 8.

passage, ten pages further on, where Lenin seems to argue for some type of unity of idealism and materialism and clearly argues the merits of an 'intelligent idealism': 'Intelligent idealism is nearer to intelligent materialism than is stupid materialism. Dialectical idealism instead of intelligent; metaphysical, undeveloped, dead, vulgar, static, instead of stupid.'¹⁶ Although the second sentence is very obscure and illustrates some of the difficulties in analysing a text that was not intended for publication, the first sentence is a remarkably forceful statement on the unity of certain types of idealism with materialism. Assuming a similarity between what he here calls stupid materialism and the category he developed earlier, vulgar materialism, this statement can be read as a very sharp critique of the Marxism of the Second International. As I have argued with regard to similar statements in the 'Abstract of Hegel's *Science of Logic*', Lenin probably has in mind here not only Plekhanov's writings on materialism but also his own earlier writings. In this passage Lenin seems to echo what the young Marx wrote in the first thesis on Feuerbach and in the *1844 Manuscripts*. Lenin's statement on intelligent idealism seems to be in basic accord with Marx's first thesis. This is a very sharp break with Engels and the leading theorists of the Second International, who, as we have seen, stressed the two irreconcilably opposed camps in philosophy, materialism and idealism, as the yardstick by which Marxism should view philosophical issues.

But that is not all. In another statement on the following page of his notes, Lenin goes on to make explicit that it is the distinction between Hegelian dialectics (intelligent idealism) and Plekhanov-type philosophical materialism (stupid materialism) that he sees as the dividing line. No longer is it a question of accepting Plekhanov's philosophy while opposing his political conclusions, as in 1908. Here Lenin makes his most explicit attack anywhere on what he views as Plekhanov's failure to grapple with Hegelian dialectics in a serious way: 'Work out: Plekhanov wrote probably nearly 1,000 pages (Beltov + against Bogdanov + against Kantians + basic questions, etc. etc. on philosophy (dialectic). There is in them *nil* about the Larger Logic, *its* thoughts (i.e., dialectic *proper*, as a philosophic science) *nil*!!'¹⁷ These statements show the extent to which Lenin was breaking with the foundation of his early philosophic concepts, the concepts of both mainstream Bolshevism and Menshevism: Plekhanovite philosophical materialism. The passage just quoted is a sharp critique of established Marxism and a pointing back toward Marx's own *1844 Manuscripts*. It is also important to note, however, that Lenin never made public these attacks

¹⁶ CW 38:274.

¹⁷ Ibid.

on Plekhanov and vulgar materialism, not even in his writings on Hegel and dialectics after 1917.

In an additional note that he entitles 'Hegel and dialectical materialism', Lenin discusses the relationship of Hegel's dialectic to materialism: 'Hegel seriously "believed", thought, that materialism as a philosophy was impossible, for philosophy is the science of thinking, of the *universal*, but the universal is a thought. Here he repeated the error of the same subjective idealism that he always called "bad" idealism. Objective (and still more, absolute) idealism came *very close* to materialism by a zig-zag (and a somersault), even partially *became transformed into it*'.¹⁸

Thus, far from one-sidedly rejecting *in toto* the '*Ideenmystik*' of the *Science of Logic*, Lenin is in these notes extending his appreciative Marxist reading of Hegelian dialectics.

Hegel's shorter *Philosophy of History* gets even less space in Lenin's notes than does the *History of Philosophy*, a mere eight pages of notes concluding with the following statement: 'In general the philosophy of history yields very, very little – this is comprehensible, for it is precisely here, in this field, in this science, that Marx and Engels made the greatest step forward. Here most of all, Hegel is obsolete and antiquated'.¹⁹ Thus it is Hegel's generalisations on the dialectic rather than its application to history and politics where Lenin finds the most affinity between Hegel and Marxism. Although he does not mention it in his notes, here Lenin is once again in sharp disagreement with Plekhanov, since, as we have seen, the latter saw the *Philosophy of History* as being the work by Hegel most relevant for Marxism.

During this period Lenin also made a brief four-page set of notes that he entitled 'Plan of Hegel's Dialectics (Logic)'. Part of these notes simply record the chapter headings of Hegel's *Encyclopedia Logic*, but there is also the following major statement on the relationship of Hegel to Marxism: 'If Marx did not leave behind him a "Logic" (with a capital letter), he did leave the *logic* of *Capital*, and this ought to be utilised to the full in this question. In *Capital*, Marx applied to a single science logic, dialectics and the theory of knowledge of materialism (three words are not needed: it is one and the same thing) which has taken everything valuable in Hegel and developed it further'.²⁰ Brief as these notes are, this statement makes the link between Hegel and Marx's *Capital* unusually explicit. Here Lenin not only stresses once again what he views as the key links

18 CW 38:276.

19 CW 38:312.

20 CW 38:317.

between Hegel and Marx's *Capital*, but he also implies that Marxists need to go back to Hegel directly.

In a six-page set of notes Lenin summarises and critiques the French philosopher Georges Noël's important 1897 study of Hegel's *Logic*.²¹ He gives particular emphasis to Noël's treatment of the closing passages of the *Logic*. Lenin ridicules Noël's discussion 'on the transition from the Idea to Nature', arguing that Noël denies the realist or materialist elements in these passages and therefore escapes into abstractions: 'Help! Almost materialism!!'²² What is at issue is the following passage from Noël's study: 'To treat Nature in itself [*en soi*], abstracted from Mind, is that not to return implicitly to the most naïve realism? ... True, by interposing between the Logic and the philosophy of mind a philosophy of nature, Hegel adopts the standpoint of realism, but in doing so he is not guilty of any inconsistency ... Hegel's realism is only provisional. It is a point of view that has to be transcended [*dépassé*]'.²³ Noël's argument points to some of the problems in Lenin's own reading of the closing paragraphs of the *Science of Logic*. There, as we saw in the previous chapter, he emphasises the transition to nature as being toward materialism, leaving aside Hegel's equally important transition to mind. Without the element of mind alongside that of nature, as Noël argues perceptively, Hegelian dialectics would have returned to 'the most naïve realism'. Lenin does not seem to catch the full import of Noël's critique of naïve realism. He goes on to write summaries of a few articles on the philosophy of science, as well as on philosophical works by Lassalle, Aristotle, and Leibniz, but these are short and do not appear to lead him anywhere. There remains one key contribution in the Hegel Notebooks, however: the five-page manuscript 'On the Question of Dialectics', apparently written in 1915.

3 'On the Question of Dialectics': Lenin Critiques Engels

This five-page manuscript, first published in 1925, a year after Lenin's death, refers appreciatively to Hegel and makes some sharp critiques not only of Plekhanov but also of Engels. Lenin begins by referring to Hegel's theory of

21 Noël 1897. For a discussion of the significance of Noël's book, see Kelly 1981, who calls it 'the most substantial echo France witnessed of the dramatic development in Hegel studies' that was occurring in Germany and elsewhere in this period (p. 40). Noël's book first appeared as a series of articles in the well-known journal *Revue de métaphysique et de morale*, for which Émile Durkheim and other leading sociologists and philosophers also wrote.

22 *CW* 38:320.

23 Noël 1897, p. 129. See also Lenin, *CW* 38:322–23.

contradiction. Despite several passing references to Lassalle, Heraclitus, and Aristotle in this first paragraph, the main thrust of the paragraph is Hegelian: ‘The splitting of a single whole and the cognition of its contradictory parts ... is the *essence* ... of dialectics. That is precisely how Hegel, too, puts the matter’.²⁴ Not only does Lenin begin this essay with Hegelian dialectics, but he moves almost immediately to a sharp critique of Plekhanov: ‘This aspect of dialectics (e.g., in Plekhanov) usually receives inadequate attention: the identity of opposites is taken as the sum-total of *examples* (“for example, a seed”, “for example, primitive communism”. The same is true of Engels. But it is “in the interests of popularisation ...”) and not as a *law of cognition* (and as a law of the objective world)’.²⁵ Here he is criticising Plekhanov’s subsuming of the category of contradiction under that of totality – as if dialectics were a mere summing up of the various parts of a whole. To Lenin, as he makes clear in the ‘Abstract of Hegel’s *Science of Logic*’, contradiction means instead both the unity of, and the struggle between, opposites.

What is really new here, however, is that Lenin does not spare even Engels, criticising him explicitly for the first time anywhere in the Hegel Notebooks. In the passage just cited he also writes that Engels had vulgarised dialectics similarly to the way in which Plekhanov had. Although Engels is let off the hook because of his good intentions (‘popularisation’), it is clear that Lenin sees a need for Marxists to go more deeply into the Hegelian concept of contradiction than did Engels.

Lenin goes on to present his own view of the ‘spontaneous development’ of human history and ideas. He sees ‘two basic ... conceptions of development (evolution): ... development as decrease and increase, as repetition, *and* development as a unity of opposites’.²⁶ He is of course interested only in ‘self-movement’ and not in what he perceives in Hegel as an ‘external’ source (God). The latter is only the ‘first conception’. In the ‘second conception the chief attention is directed precisely to knowledge of the source of “self-movement”. This category, self-movement, ‘alone furnishes the key to the “leaps”, to the “break in continuity”, to the “transformation into the opposite”, to the destruction of the old and the emergence of the new’.²⁷

Thus, the concept of self-movement is the key to Lenin’s whole concept of dialectic. It is the Hegelian dialectic that Lenin is summarising, critiquing, and developing into his own concept of dialectic in this essay, especially in the

24 *cw* 38:357.

25 *Ibid.*, ellipsis in original.

26 *Ibid.*

27 *Ibid.*

light of the themes covered by his larger 'Abstract of Hegel's *Science of Logic*'. Although the emphasis here on leaps or breaks in continuity is, as we have seen, generally consistent with parts of Engels's *Anti-Dühring*, the stress on self-movement as the key to these leaps is Lenin's own, apparently developed out of his study of the *Science of Logic*. Engels, as was shown earlier, tended to draw too close an affinity between the movement of inanimate matter and the self-development of human consciousness and activity.

Lenin also shows that he is continuing to read Hegel's absolute idea 'materialistically' and now also as a critique of relativism: 'NB: The distinction between subjectivism (scepticism, sophistry, etc.) and dialectics, incidentally, is that in (objective) dialectics the difference between the relative and the absolute is itself relative. For objective dialectics there *is* an absolute *within* the relative. For subjectivism and sophistry the relative is only relative and excludes the absolute'.²⁸ This critique of relativism calls for a dialectical relationship between the universal and the particular. Part of this argument is not entirely new for Lenin, however, since he had written already in *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* that 'for dialectical materialism there is no impassable boundary between relative and absolute truth'.²⁹ In that work he argues further: 'Dialectics – as Hegel in his time explained – *contains* an element of relativism, of negation, of scepticism, but *is not reducible* to relativism'.³⁰ Contrary to what I have been emphasising here, Lefebvre argues that this last comment illustrates a major continuity between *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* and the Hegel Notebooks.³¹ Although that may be true, there are many more key texts in which Lenin's 1914–15 writings go significantly beyond his own earlier work and that of the leading Marxist theorists of the period, whom he attacked as vulgar materialists.

Next Lenin moves to argue once again for a direct link from Hegelian dialectics to Chapter 1 of Marx's *Capital*, 'Commodities': 'In his *Capital*, Marx first analyzes the simplest, most ordinary and fundamental, most common and everyday *relation* of bourgeois (commodity) society, a relation encountered billions of times, viz. the exchange of commodities. In this very simple phenomenon (in this "cell" of bourgeois society) analysis reveals *all* the contradictions or the germs of *all* the contradictions of modern society'.³² Here once again, Lenin is probably the first twentieth-century Marxist not only to see the

28 CW 38:358.

29 CW 14:136.

30 CW 14:137.

31 See Lefebvre 1957, p. 198. For a discussion of Lefebvre, see Chapters 7 and 8.

32 CW 38:358–59.

relation between the structure of *Capital* and Hegel's *Science of Logic* but also to single out Marx's analysis of the commodity in Chapter 1 of *Capital* as the one that reveals all the contradictions of capitalist society.

Lenin goes on to trace the relationship of individual to universal in Hegel and makes another sharp attack on Plekhanov and all established Marxism. He gives the following overview of dialectics: 'Dialectics is the theory of knowledge of (Hegel and) Marxism. This is the "aspect" of the matter (it is not an "aspect", but the *essence* of the matter) to which Plekhanov, not to speak of other Marxists, paid no attention'.³³ Never has Lenin claimed more explicitly a unity between Marx and Hegel, on the one hand, and a differentiation of them from Plekhanov and other Marxists, on the other.

He concludes the essay with a sharp attack on 'crude, simple' vulgar materialism. In the process he makes clear his own critical appropriation of philosophical idealism: 'Philosophical idealism is *only* nonsense from the standpoint of crude, simple, metaphysical materialism. From the standpoint of *dialectical* materialism, on the other hand, philosophical idealism is a *one-sided*, exaggerated, *überschwengliches*³⁴ (Dietzgen) development ... Idealism is clerical obscurantism. True. But philosophical idealism is ('*more correctly*' and '*in addition*') a *road* to clerical obscurantism *through one of the shades* of the infinitely complex *knowledge* (dialectical) of man'.³⁵ Although at one point in this passage Lenin sharply separates himself from idealism, even rather crudely calling it 'clerical obscurantism', as if a secular idealism were impossible, at the same time there is an even sharper attack on vulgar materialism. Idealism, for all its flaws, is a pathway to truth and human liberation in a way that vulgar materialism is not. Part of the confusion in Lenin's argument is no doubt due to the fact that this is only a rough draft, not a finished essay.

Here is how he gives his own concept of human knowledge. He speaks of a spiral rather than a straight line:

Human knowledge is not (or does not follow) a straight line, but a curve, which endlessly approximates a series of circles, a spiral. Any fragment, segment, section of this curve can be transformed (transformed one-sidedly) into an independent, complete, straight line, which then (if one does not see the wood for the trees) leads into the quagmire, into clerical

33 *cw* 38:362.

34 In this particular passage, the German word *überschwengliches* is seemingly a repetition in German of what Lenin already had written in Russian, 'exaggerated', and thus carries no independent meaning.

35 *cw* 38:361.

obscurantism ... And clerical obscurantism (= philosophical idealism) ... is a sterile flower undoubtedly, but a sterile flower that grows on the living tree of living, fertile, genuine, powerful, omnipotent, objective, absolute human knowledge.³⁶

With this provocative essay fragment we have come to the end of Lenin's 1914–15 writings on Hegelian dialectics. He has concluded the Hegel Notebooks with discussions of the relationship of idealism to materialism and with a sharp critique not only of Plekhanov but also of Engels. These notes and writings on Hegel and dialectics cover over three hundred pages and took him many months to complete. They bring out almost a tug-of-war in Lenin's mind. On the one hand there is his earlier scientific Marxist materialism, drawn from Plekhanov and sharpened in his 1908 debates with the Machist Bogdanov. On the other hand is Lenin's new concept of Hegelian dialectics as revolutionary. Now he treats Hegelian dialectics as the source of all dialectics and as a critique of the contemplative vulgar materialism of established Marxism.

4 Lenin's Public Writings on Dialectics, 1915–23: Hegelian Marxism and Philosophical Ambivalence

The period from August 1914 to April 1917 was one of dramatic change for Lenin. He broke with the Second International and tried to found a new international. In that period he also advocated revolutionary defeatism, wrote his book *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism*, and began to prepare notes for *State and Revolution*. In that same crucial period, as shown in the table below, Lenin wrote just over 3,000 pages of articles, private notebooks, and letters as published in the English edition of his *Collected Works* (vols. 21–3, 35–9, 41). This averages around three pages per day. The published works alone total over 1,400 pages for this period, the main one of which is of course *Imperialism* (120 pages), for which he wrote no fewer than 768 pages of *Notebooks on Imperialism* in 1915–16 (CW 39). About a year before, during the period from August 1914 to mid-1915, he wrote 245 pages of notes on Hegel and related issues, including the essay 'On the Question of Dialectics' and reviews of secondary literature on Hegel. In 1916–17 he also wrote notes for *State and Revolution*, which, at least in their published form, are far briefer than those on either Hegel or imperialism.

36 CW 38:363.

TABLE 1 Topics in Lenin's writings, 1914–17

Type of writings	Number of pages	
	August 1914–April 1917	August–December 1914 only
Notes on Hegel	245	158
Notes on other thinkers	89	19
Notebooks on imperialism	768	–
Letters	518	67
Other	1,407	114
Total pages	3,027	358

Source: Lenin, *Collected Works* (English ed.)

From the period of September to December 1914, however, when Lenin was doing his most intensive Hegel studies, there are only 114 pages of works and notes on other topics, plus 158 pages of notes on Hegel and the 19 pages of notes on Feuerbach. Table 1 breaks this output down in terms of numbers of pages (including even those letters that have been published) for the period between the outbreak of World War I and Lenin's return to Russia in April 1917. Page numbers are once again based on the English edition of Lenin's *Collected Works*. It is shown that Lenin's notes on Hegel actually overshadow everything else in terms of numbers of pages written during the first months after the outbreak of war in 1914. In August–December 1914 he wrote more pages of notes on Hegel than either private letters (mostly to fellow Bolsheviks) or articles for publication. Even when the sheer bulk of the *Notebooks on Imperialism*, which is three times the length of the Hegel Notebooks, is taken into account, the importance of Hegel for Lenin is underlined rather than diminished, for the *Notebooks on Imperialism* is made up generally of short extracts from hundreds of books and articles – the longest entry is but 20 pages. Nor is there any extended discussion in the *Notebooks on Imperialism* of any one particular writer. In fact, except perhaps for the constant references to Kautsky in virtually all the published writings in this period, there is no writer who, judging by the *Collected Works* and the size of the various pieces, preoccupied Lenin during the period August 1914 to April 1917 so much as Hegel did. Even Marx was apparently not studied as closely as was Hegel, at least on the basis of the notes Lenin made during this period.

Despite this great preoccupation with Hegel, Lenin never published a book or even an article on Hegelian dialectics during this period or afterward. He

did publish several major works on Marxist theory, however, especially *Imperialism* and *State and Revolution*. Therein lies the paradox that I need to unravel now. I will try to do so at two levels. The first level, the discussion of which follows immediately, involves examining some of Lenin's public references to Hegel and to dialectics after 1914. The second involves examining the structure, method, and context of his two main theoretical works after 1914, *Imperialism* and *State and Revolution*. In the next two chapters I look at their relationship to the 1914–15 Hegel Notebooks.

I have mentioned earlier the important essay 'Karl Marx', with its section on dialectics that Lenin wanted to expand still further after completing his study of Hegel's *Science of Logic*. By 1915 Lenin had published several long pamphlets on the attitude revolutionary socialists needed to take toward the war, developing his concept of revolutionary defeatism. In one of them, the fifty-page article 'The Collapse of the Second International', written in May and June 1915, which I took up at the beginning of this chapter, he refers explicitly to Hegelian dialectics.

4.1 *Dialectics 'Shamelessly Distorted by Plekhanov'*

Here is how Lenin refers to Hegel in a critique of Plekhanov, who at this point supported the Allies and the Russian government in the war:

Plekhanov has set a new record in the noble sport of substituting sophistry for dialectics. The sophist grabs at one of many 'arguments'; it was Hegel who long ago very properly observed that 'arguments' can be found to prove anything in the world. Dialectics calls for a many-sided investigation into a given social phenomenon in its development, and for the external and the apparent to be reduced to the fundamental motive forces, to the development of the productive forces and the class struggle. ... With reference to wars the main thesis of dialectics, which has been so shamelessly distorted by Plekhanov to please the bourgeoisie, is that '*war is simply the continuation of politics by other (i.e., violent) means*'. Such is the formula of Clausewitz, one of the greatest writers on the history of war, whose thinking was stimulated by Hegel.³⁷

This type of explicit and uncritical reference to Hegelian dialectics, without also immediately attacking Hegel for idealism, was unprecedented not only for Lenin but for the whole tradition of Marxism out of which Bolshevism

37 CW 21:218–19.

emerged after the turn of the century. Such an open recourse to Hegel was not evident, for example, in Lenin's argument against Machism and Bogdanov in *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*. The passage just quoted is the only public attack on Plekhanov for specifically philosophical reasons that I have found. This is notable in the light of Lenin's subsequent recommendation, in 1920, that Plekhanov's works be published and studied, especially by Soviet youth.

Although not referring explicitly to Hegel this time, in the same 1915 essay Lenin also uses the concept of dialectic in a critique of Kautsky: 'Kautsky is exploiting the *hope* for a *new* peaceful era of capitalism so as to justify the adhesion of the opportunists and the official Social Democratic parties to the bourgeoisie, and their rejection of the revolutionary, i.e., proletarian, tactics in the *present stormy era*, this despite the solemn declarations of the Basel resolution. ... Marxist dialectics, as the last word in the scientific-evolutionary method, excludes any isolated examination of an object'.³⁸ A pattern that will repeat itself begins to emerge here. The pattern recurs when Lenin faces a well-known Marxist theorist whom he wants to criticise. This will pertain not only to people such as Kautsky and Plekhanov, whom he considered to be 'betrayers', but also to theorists further to the left who in many respects shared Lenin's political views, theorists such as Bukharin, Trotsky, and Luxemburg. In his writings after 1914 Lenin will usually not only criticise their political or economic analysis but also will bring in his new concept of Marxist dialectics. He will publicly fault his opponents on grounds of being nondialectical or halfway dialectical.

4.2 *Luxemburg 'Applies Marxist Dialectics Only Halfway'*

An example of this sort of argument occurs in his 1916 review of Luxemburg's important anti-war manifesto, the *Junius Pamphlet*, so named because Luxemburg signed it with the pen name 'Junius'. When he wrote his critique Lenin was unaware that Junius was Luxemburg. As he begins his critique, Lenin writes: 'On the whole, the Junius pamphlet is a splendid Marxist work'.³⁹ He shifts his tone, however, when he comes to one of his key disagreements with the pamphlet, on its analysis of the national question. Luxemburg portrays nationalism as inevitably reactionary in an era of imperialism, whereas Lenin is developing instead a concept of revolutionary nationalism as national liberation in the case of the nationalism of small or powerless nations dominated by the great powers. In his critique of Junius Lenin writes that this disagreement is connected not only to politics but also to dialectics:

³⁸ CW 21:225, 235.

³⁹ CW 22:306.

The fallacy of this argument is obvious. That all dividing lines, both in nature and society, are conventional and dynamic, and that every phenomenon might, under certain conditions, be transformed into its opposite, is, of course, a basic proposition of Marxist dialectics. A national war might be transformed into an imperialist war and vice-versa. ... Only a sophist can disregard the difference between an imperialist and a national war on the grounds that one might develop into the other. Not infrequently have dialectics served – and the history of Greek philosophy is an example – as a bridge to sophistry.⁴⁰

Here Lenin takes his key dialectical category from the 'Abstract of Hegel's *Science of Logic*', the 'transformation into opposite', and uses it as part of a largely political critique of Luxemburg. He continues this theme in his conclusion, introducing the concept of halfway dialectics: 'In saying that the class struggle is the best means of defence against invasion, Junius applies Marxist dialectics only halfway, taking one step on the right road and immediately deviating from it. Marxist dialectics call for a concrete analysis of each specific historical situation'.⁴¹ Thus, the failure to embrace dialectics more fully is the source of what Lenin regards as Luxemburg's errors on the national question. I will return to this issue in the next chapter.

4.3 *Lenin's 'Will': Bukharin 'Never Fully Understood the Dialectic'*

During the war the young Bolshevik theoretician Bukharin adopted a position similar to that of Luxemburg on the national question, and Lenin wrote at length against his position.⁴² This apparently forms part of the background to the critical assessment of Bukharin that appeared in 1922–3 in Lenin's 'Will': 'Bukharin is not only the most valuable and biggest theorist of the Party; he may also be legitimately considered the favorite of the whole Party; but his theoretical views can only with the greatest doubt be regarded as fully Marxian, for there is something scholastic in him. (He has never learned, and I think never fully understood, the dialectic.)'⁴³ Surely something serious was at stake

⁴⁰ *CW* 22:309.

⁴¹ *CW* 22:316.

⁴² This debate is taken up in the next chapter.

⁴³ *CW* 36:595. Although I give reference in the text to the standard Moscow *Collected Works*, which belatedly published Lenin's 'Will', I am using the more polished and hard-hitting translation published by Trotsky in Lenin 1970, pp. 6–7. The official Moscow translation plays down Bukharin's theoretical importance by, among other things, rendering Lenin's characterisation of him as 'a most valuable and *major* theorist of the Party' rather than, as in Trotsky's version '*the* most valuable and *biggest* theorist of the Party'.

for Lenin if the ‘biggest’ theoretician of the party, Bukharin, never fully understood the dialectic. It should be underlined that dialectics is the *only* point on which Bukharin is specifically criticised in the same will where Lenin talks of removing Stalin from his position as general secretary because of his rudeness. Others are also criticised for having an overly administrative or bureaucratic attitude (not only Stalin but also Trotsky and Pyatakov) and for having opposed the November Revolution (Zinoviev and Kamenev). It is extremely noteworthy, however, that the only specifically theoretical issue referred to in the entire will is dialectics. The national question, the state and revolution, economics – not one of these other theoretical issues is referred to explicitly. That surely indicates the supreme importance of dialectics for Lenin at this key point, when he was summing up his ideas for his Bolshevik colleagues and evaluating those colleagues as well.

Bukharin’s philosophical writings also show some important differences with those of Lenin in the Hegel Notebooks. In his major work on Marxist theory, *Historical Materialism: A System of Sociology*, first published in 1921, Bukharin includes a section on dialectical materialism where he writes: ‘In our consideration of the question of the human will, the question whether it is free, or determined by certain causes, like everything else in the world, we arrived at the conclusion that we must adopt the point of view of determinism’.⁴⁴ Thus Bukharin openly avows himself a determinist. In addition he makes a very sharp attack on Hegel that seems to exclude all idealism as inherently clerical and mystical: ‘idealism involves an admission of the independence of ideas from the material, and of the dependence of these ideas on divine and mysterious springs. It is therefore obvious that the idealist point of view involves a downright mysticism, or other tomfoolery, in the social sciences, ... to their substitution by faith in the acts of God or in some other such conception ... Hegel, the greatest philosopher of idealism, defined the history of the world as a “rational, necessary evolution (Gang) of the world spirit”’.⁴⁵ As the Canadian sovietologist Richard Day notes in his critique of Bukharin’s Marxism: ‘In the *Philosophical Notebooks* Lenin had come much closer to appreciating the humanistic aspect of Marxism with the observation that “man’s consciousness not only reflects the objective world but creates it”’.⁴⁶ In his *Prison Notebooks*

44 Bukharin 1925 [1921], p. 53.

45 Ibid., p. 59.

46 Richard B. Day, introduction to Bukharin 1982, p. xlv. See also Day 1976, where he concludes: ‘Lenin was perfectly correct when he wrote in the testament that Bukharin had never understood dialectics. In all of his major works Bukharin sought to articulate gener-

Antonio Gramsci makes an even sharper attack on *Historical Materialism*: 'The philosophy implicit in [*Historical Materialism*] could be called a positivistic Aristotelianism, an adaption of formal logic to the methods of physical and natural science. The historical dialectic is replaced by the law of causality and the search for regularity, normality and uniformity'.⁴⁷ Thus, Bukharin stresses science, determinism, and materialism, whereas Lenin, at least after 1914, moves to a great extent away from this view and toward one that sees Hegel's idealism as the ground for a more fully dialectical Marxist materialism.

4.4 *Philosophical Ambivalence: Hegel, but also Plekhanov*

Another important set of references to Hegelian dialectics occurs in Lenin's critique of Trotsky (as well as Bukharin, Shliapnikov, and Kollontai) in the Trade Union Debate of 1920–1. Lenin's 1921 pamphlet *Once Again on the Trade Unions*⁴⁸ has an eighteen-page section on dialectics just before the conclusion. Part of it is entitled 'Dialectics and Eclecticism. "School" and "Apparatus"'. Bukharin had attempted to create a 'buffer group' between Lenin's faction and that of Trotsky, Lenin's main opponent in the Trade Union Debate. At that time Trotsky favoured continuing War Communism's tight military discipline over the working class and the trade unions even though the Russian civil war was drawing to an end. The other faction, led by Shliapnikov and Kollontai, took a more syndicalist position, while Lenin advocated a centralised single-party state, but with strong and independent trade unions. The central issue for this study is Lenin's discussion of Hegel and dialectics rather than the specifics of the enormously complicated Trade Union Debate.⁴⁹

Lenin begins his pamphlet's section on dialectics by praising Bukharin for his 'theoretical ability and keen interest in getting at the theoretical roots of every question'. A few lines later, however, he ridicules Bukharin's statement that 'neither the political nor the economic factor can be ignored'.⁵⁰ Lenin adds:

alized conclusions without first analysing the manifold particularities and contradictions inherent in the concrete totality of both capitalist and soviet society' (p. 260).

47 Gramsci 1971, p. 437. Another sharp critique of *Historical Materialism* was made by Lukács in the 1920s in his review article 'Technology and Social Relations', in Lukács 1973, pp. 49–60. For more generous assessments of Bukharin's Marxism, see Kozlov and Weitz (eds.) 1990; Cohen 1985; and Seymour Martin Lipset's introduction to Michels 1962, pp. 15–39. See also Anderson 1987.

48 CW 32:70–108.

49 For a treatment of this debate from a vantage point sympathetic to Lenin's position, see Dunayevskaya 1988 [1958]:196–201. For an account that is more critical of Lenin, see Daniels 1960:119–36.

50 CW 32:90.

‘The gist of his theoretical mistake in this case is substitution of eclecticism for the dialectical interplay of politics and economics (which we find in Marxism). His theoretical attitude is: “on the one hand, and on the other”, “the one and the other”. That is eclecticism. Dialectics requires an all-round consideration of relationships in their concrete development but not a patchwork of bits and pieces.’⁵¹ More interestingly, he also brings in Hegel directly, giving the following definition of dialectical logic:

Dialectical logic demands that we should go further. Firstly, if we are to have a true knowledge of an object we must look at and examine all its facets, its connections and ‘mediacies’. That is something we cannot ever hope to achieve completely, but the rule of comprehensiveness is a safeguard against mistakes and rigidity. Secondly, dialectical logic requires that an object should be taken in development, in change, in ‘self-movement’ (as Hegel sometimes puts it). This is not immediately obvious in respect of such an object as a tumbler, but it, too, is in flux, and this holds especially true for its purpose, use and *connection* with the surrounding world. Thirdly, a full ‘definition’ of an object must include the whole of human experience, both as a criterion of truth and a practical indicator of its connection with human wants.⁵²

Especially noteworthy here are the explicit mention of Hegelian dialectics and the brief elaboration of some of the key categories from the Hegel Notebooks: interconnection, contradiction, and self-movement, among others.

The reader should note, however, that the way in which Lenin elaborates these categories also raises the question of his ambivalence toward his new philosophical ideas on Hegelian dialectics.⁵³ In the text immediately following the discussion of dialectical logic just cited, he suddenly brings in Plekhanov: ‘Fourthly, dialectical logic holds that “truth is always concrete, never abstract”, as the late Plekhanov liked to say after Hegel. (Let me add in parenthesis for the benefit of young Party members that you cannot hope to become a real intelligent Communist without making a study – and I mean study – of all of Plekhanov’s philosophical writings, because nothing better has been written on Marxism anywhere in the world.)’⁵⁴ An attached footnote reads: ‘By

51 *CW* 32:91.

52 *CW* 32:94.

53 The term *ambivalence* has been adopted from Dunayevskaya’s *Philosophy and Revolution*. I will discuss her concept of Lenin’s philosophical ambivalence further in Chapter 8.

54 *CW* 32:94.

the way, it would be a good thing, first, if the current edition of Plekhanov's works contained a special volume or volumes of all his philosophical articles, with detailed indexes, etc., to be included in a series of standard textbooks on communism; secondly, I think the workers' state must demand that professors of philosophy should have a knowledge of Plekhanov's exposition of Marxist philosophy and [an] ability to impart it to their students'.⁵⁵ The discussion of dialectics in Lenin's pamphlet, as innovative as it was, nonetheless avoids mentioning any of the critiques of Plekhanov that occur numerous times in the Hegel Notebooks, whether around the issue of vulgar materialism or on Plekhanov's never having made a systematic study of Hegel's *Science of Logic*. Nor are the more general critiques of Plekhanov as undialectical that are found in Lenin's 1915 article on revolutionary defeatism repeated here. Was this done deliberately, to soften his otherwise 'Hegelian' argument for his Bolshevik audience? Few of them, if any, had also become involved in the direct study of Hegel. Mainly they held Plekhanovite-type views of Marxism as materialism, as had Lenin himself before 1914. Or was Lenin himself ambivalent about his new work around dialectics?

Regardless of whether the cause was his own reluctance to add yet another controversy for his Bolsheviks to grapple with or his occupation with concrete political issues such as the national question and the bureaucratisation of the new Soviet state, not to mention the civil war, economic reconstruction, and the attempt to extend the Russian revolution internationally to Europe and Asia, Lenin did fail to finish or publish his study of dialectics. He also left a trail of somewhat ambivalent statements behind on dialectics. Although the main thrust of his statements on dialectics was toward Hegelian Marxism, as seen in the Trade Union Debate, he was also capable of referring in glowing terms to Plekhanov. This is a step backward from his characterisation of Plekhanov in the Hegel Notebooks as a vulgar materialist who had never made a serious study of Hegel's *Science of Logic*, a characterisation that Lenin never made public at any time after writing it in those notebooks.

During the same period Lenin also allowed the reprinting without changes of his *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*. In a one-paragraph preface to the new edition, Lenin expresses the hope that the book will 'prove useful as an aid to acquaintance with the philosophy of Marxism, dialectical materialism'. He also notes his continued opposition to Bogdanov, particularly to the latter's

55 CW 32:94.

new activity around the concept of 'proletarian culture', a concept that Lenin dubbed 'bourgeois and reactionary'.⁵⁶ The main purpose of reissuing *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* in 1920 may have been to undermine Bogdanov once again, at a time when his movement for proletarian culture was gaining adherents among many Bolsheviks, Bukharin included. Whatever his intentions were, however, Lenin's reissue of this book with a new preface that does not mention his Hegel Notebooks muddied the waters considerably as to what his post-1914 concept of dialectic was. It is a prime example of Lenin's philosophical ambivalence.

In addition to including Lenin's brief preface, this reprint also contains Vladimir Nevsky's appendix entitled 'Dialectical Materialism and the Philosophy of Dead Reaction'. This appendix, Lenin writes in his preface, takes up 'Bogdanov's latest works, which I have had no opportunity to examine'.⁵⁷ Nevsky's appendix, which was dropped from later editions after the author got into trouble with the Stalinist authorities, refers to Engels's notion of two camps, idealism and materialism, and then accuses Bogdanov of propagating the 'purest idealism'.⁵⁸ Nevsky mentions Hegel only when he quotes Bogdanov to the effect that 'the conception of dialectics, of Marx as well as Hegel', contains 'elements of arbitrariness'.⁵⁹ This could have been an opportunity to counterpose the dialectic of Hegel and Marx to Bogdanov's conceptions. Instead, Nevsky attempts to defend 'the founder of scientific socialism', but not Hegel, from the charge of arbitrariness. All in all, Nevsky's essay is a crude performance, showing no awareness whatsoever of the revolutionary aspects of Hegelian idealism. Its appearance in the 1920 edition of *Materialism and Empirio*

56 CW 14:21.

57 CW 14:21.

58 Nevsky in Lenin 1927a, p. 331. The publication of this text in Western languages has a curious history. It appeared in the first German and English editions of *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* in 1927. The English-language edition lists David Kvitko as translator but says that he worked 'with the assistance of Dr. Sidney Hook'. The volume also carried a lengthy and fairly informative preface by Abram Deborin, one of the leading Soviet philosophers of the 1920s. This volume was evidently part of a project to publish Lenin's *Collected Works*, with *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* as Volume 13. The edition seems to have been stopped after the publication of this single volume, however, and a new translation of *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* was later published as a separate book. In typical Stalinist style, Nevsky's appendix, Kvitko and Hook's participation in the translation of the earlier edition, and Deborin's preface were not included or even mentioned in that edition or in subsequent ones. I would like to thank David Joravsky for bringing Nevsky's appendix to my attention.

59 Nevsky in Lenin 1927a, p. 332.

-*Criticism* with Lenin's endorsement serves still further to cloud over Lenin's own debt to Hegel and the important changes and innovations in his concept of dialectic after 1914.

4.5 A 'Society of Materialist Friends of Hegelian Dialectics'

The closest Lenin comes to making his Hegel Notebooks public is his article 'On the Significance of Militant Materialism' (1922) written for *Pod Znamenem Marksizma* (Under the Banner of Marxism), a major new theoretical journal of the time. He eases his readers into the subject of Hegel by declaring that although the materialism of natural science was surely to be welcomed in the struggle against 'clerical obscurantism', on the other hand, 'it must be realised that no natural science and no materialism can hold its own in the struggles against the onslaught of bourgeois ideas and the restoration of the bourgeois world outlook unless it stands on solid philosophical ground'.⁶⁰ Therefore, Lenin continues, one must be a 'consistent', 'modern', and 'Marxist' materialist, 'a dialectical materialist'.

Then comes his explicit advocacy of the study of Hegelian dialectics, linked directly to what will be discussed in the next chapter, his post-1914 concept of new revolutionary subjects outside the working class in the Asian anticolonial national liberation struggles:

In order to attain this aim, the contributors to *Pod Znamenem Marksizma* must arrange for the systematic study of Hegelian dialectics from a materialist standpoint, i.e., the dialectics which Marx applied practically in his *Capital* and in his historical and political works, and applied so successfully that now every day of the awakening to life and struggle of the new classes in the East (Japan, India, and China) – i.e., the hundreds of millions of human beings who form the greater part of the world population and whose historical passivity and historical torpor have hitherto conditioned the stagnation and decay of many advanced European countries – every day of the awakening to life of new peoples and new classes serves as a fresh confirmation of Marxism.⁶¹

Sensing perhaps that his readers would be sceptical not only on ideological grounds but also because of the difficulty of understanding Hegel, Lenin adds:

60 CW 33:233.

61 CW 33:234.

Of course, this study, this interpretation, this propaganda of Hegelian dialectics is extremely difficult, and the first experiments in this direction will undoubtedly be accompanied by errors. But only he who never does anything never makes mistakes. Taking as our basis Marx's method of applying materialistically conceived Hegelian dialectics, we can and should elaborate this dialectics from all aspects, print in the journal excerpts from Hegel's principal works, interpret them materialistically and comment on them with the help of examples of dialectics in the sphere of economic and political relations, which recent history, especially modern imperialist war and revolution, provides in unusual abundance. In my opinion, the editors and contributors of *Pod Zname-nem Marksizma* should be a kind of 'Society of Materialist Friends of Hegelian Dialectics' ... Unless it sets itself such a task and systematically fulfills it, materialism cannot be militant materialism.⁶²

This essay's most striking feature is its open call for intensive study not of dialectics in general but specifically of Hegelian dialectics and for the publication of Hegel's writings in Soviet Russia's leading Marxist journal. It is Lenin's fullest public indication of what he had developed in his Hegel Notebooks.

Lenin's position was presented, however, under the category of 'militant materialism' rather than what Lenin had pointed to in the Hegel Notebooks, the unity of idealism and materialism, a concept that reconnected to the young Marx. Therefore it could be *and was* read by his successors as fundamentally continuous with Lenin's earlier work and with the Marxism of the Second International, which, in the works of other Bolshevik theorists such as Trotsky or Bukharin,⁶³ underwent no significant change on dialectics after 1914. Unlike Lenin's article on the Trade Union Debate, there was no call to study Plekhanov – but neither was there any explicit critique of Plekhanov.

4.6 *Dialectics of Revolution and the 'Oriental, Non-European Countries'*

Lenin's last major reference to dialectics is in one of his final writings, composed even after his 'Will' of December 1922–January 1923. This piece was writ-

62 CW 33:233–4.

63 Trotsky's theoretical work after 1914 shows little development on the issue of dialectics. Even when in exile during the 1930s, he never grappled seriously with Hegel or with the major works on Marxist dialectics published by then, which included Marx's *1844 Manuscripts*, Lenin's Hegel Notebooks, and Lukács's earlier publication, *History and Class Consciousness*. Trotsky's continued adherence to a crude form of scientific materialism is evident in his most philosophical work of the 1930s, published as Trotsky 1986.

ten, like the 'Will', while Lenin was immobilised by his stroke but able on certain days to do a little dictating. The article in question is a brief appraisal, written in January 1923, of the leading Menshevik writer N. Sukhanov's famous *Notes on the Revolution*. First Lenin takes up what he calls the 'German model' of the Second International, the orthodox Marxism of his own youth and the early Bolsheviks, as well as of the Germans. He criticises it as follows:

They call themselves Marxists, but their conception of Marxism is impossibly pedantic. *They have completely failed to understand what is decisive in Marxism, namely, its revolutionary dialectics.* They have even absolutely failed to understand Marx's plain statements that in times of revolution the utmost flexibility is demanded ... up to now they have seen capitalism and bourgeois democracy in Western Europe follow a definite path of development, and cannot conceive that this path can be taken as a model only *mutatis mutandis*, only with certain amendments ... For instance, it does not even occur to them that because Russia stands on the border-line between the civilised countries and the countries which this war has for the first time definitely brought into the orbit of civilisation – *all the oriental, non-European countries* – she could and was, indeed, bound to reveal *certain distinguishing features*.⁶⁴

Here Lenin connects dialectics to the creative application of Marxism in a revolutionary situation. He makes this specific for an issue that the West European social democrats had ignored or played down: the revolutionary potential of what is today termed the Third World. Most important here is that Lenin has outlined fairly explicitly the link between his concept of dialectic and his concept of imperialism and national liberation. Lenin is not simply repeating earlier statements on dialectics and on national and anti-colonial revolutions; far more importantly, he has shown their intimate connection in his mind in one of his very last writings. In this way, then, Lenin keeps up until his last days a stress on what he gained from his own Hegel studies. This connection between national liberation movements and dialectics in Lenin's post-1914 writings is what will be explored in the next chapter.

First, however, it needs to be underlined that not everything was newly Hegelian or dialectical in the post-1914 Lenin. His reissue of *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* shows the extent to which he waffled, at least publicly, in his concept of dialectics. And even in the 1920–1 Trade Union Debate, as we

64 *cw* 33:476–77; emphasis added.

have seen, his direct and public references to Hegel were balanced by ones to Plekhanov, even though in his private Hegel Notebooks he had termed Plekhanov a vulgar materialist who had failed really to work out something serious on dialectics. Finally, even the most explicit public references to Hegel made in the article for *Pod Znamenem Marksizma*, which Korsch⁶⁵ was to use as a point of departure for his *Marxism and Philosophy*, contain much ambivalence on the question of idealism versus materialism. For despite Lenin's call there 'for the systematic study of Hegelian dialectics', the overall thrust of his argument is not for the unity of idealism and materialism but rather only for 'militant materialism'. Such a phrase was hardly new and could easily be seen as totally in continuity with the earlier *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*. Indeed, it was so interpreted after Lenin's death. Among the first to feel its bite were the Central European Hegelian Marxists Korsch and Lukács, who were denounced by Zinoviev at the 1924 Comintern Congress.

65 For a discussion of Korsch's and Lukács's relation to Lenin's Hegel Notebooks, see Chapter 7.

PART 2

Lenin on the Dialectics of Revolution, 1914–23



Imperialism and New Forms of Subjectivity: National Liberation Movements

I will argue in this chapter that Lenin's post-1914 writings on imperialism and national liberation were grounded in some important ways in his Hegel Notebooks. I will argue further that these writings demonstrate how greatly Lenin's 1914–15 encounter with Hegelian dialectics had affected his concept of Marxism as it was expressed in his economic and political theory. In this sense, I will suggest, the Hegel Notebooks influenced not only Lenin's general concept of dialectic but also his political and economic writings as a whole. I am not arguing that Lenin's political and economic writings were *derived* in a direct or mechanical sense from his Hegel studies. To be sure, they developed out of his detailed studies of imperialism, the state, and revolution, many of them based on some of Marx's major writings, and in response to historical events, such as the nationalist uprising in Ireland in 1916 or the reinstitution of soviets by the Russian workers in 1917. The Hegel Notebooks do not in themselves constitute the whole of Lenin's dialectics of revolution, which was worked out in response to more concrete events and issues. Nonetheless, I will argue, the Hegel Notebooks provided Lenin with an important conceptual underpinning for those studies in the dialectics of revolution.

Lenin's writings on imperialism and national liberation mark a major part of his work after 1914. In the period 1914–17 alone, when he wrote the well-known 120-page study *Imperialism*, he also filled up nearly 800 pages of what is now termed the *Notebooks on Imperialism* and wrote several hundred pages of material on national self-determination and World War 1.

In viewing *Imperialism* in relationship to these other writings, I am taking account of Lenin's own remark in the 1917 preface to its first edition, where he noted that his original intent of publishing the book legally under the tsarist censorship (by then made moot by the March Revolution) had led him to leave out much material: 'This pamphlet was written with an eye to the tsarist censorship. Hence, I was not only forced to confine myself strictly to an exclusively theoretical, specifically economic analysis of facts, but to formulate the few necessary observations on politics with extreme caution ... on these matters I had to speak in a "slavish" tongue, and I must refer the reader who is interested in the subject to the articles I wrote abroad in 1914–1917, a new edition of

which is soon to appear'.¹ Of these voluminous writings produced during 1914–17, many of which did not appear in print until several years after Lenin's death, I will consider only some of the more important ones: 'Socialist Revolution and the Right of Nations to Self-Determination' (1916; 15 pages); 'The *Junius Pamphlet*' (1916; 15 pages); 'The Discussion of Self-Determination Summed Up' (1916; 41 pages); 'A Caricature of Marxism and Imperialist Economism' (1916; 48 pages); and 'Imperialism and the Split in Socialism' (1916; 15 pages). Even a glance at this list, which includes only major pamphlets and essays, makes it clear that the debates on politics, and especially the self-determination of nations, consumed as many or more pages than the slim volume *Imperialism*.

In addition, the lengthy *Notebooks on Imperialism* shows definitively which subjects other than the economics of imperialism were on Lenin's mind as he laboured on *Imperialism* and his other published works in 1916. Although *Notebooks* deals mainly with a large number of monographs and original source material on imperialism, it also takes up writings of Marx and Engels on splits within the European labour movement and on national liberation, as well as Lenin's own research on the latter question. In short, Lenin was not limiting his view to economic theory, no matter how theoretical was his economic analysis in *Imperialism*, the book intended for legal publication in tsarist Russia. In addition to *Notebooks* and the 1915–16 articles and speeches, several contributions written after 1917 are also important for a grasp of his concepts of imperialism and national liberation and their relation to his Hegel Notebooks.

1 Economics and Dialectics in the Analysis of Imperialism

Judging by the nearly 800 pages of notes from original sources in *Notebooks on Imperialism*, it seems that Lenin had more in mind than the slim volume that was actually published. The book *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism*, canonised by official Soviet Marxism, has often been called unoriginal by more independent commentators. Some have termed it largely derivative of Bukharin's book *Imperialism and World Economy*, also published in 1917 but written in 1915, a year before Lenin's book, of Rudolf Hilferding's *Finance Capital* (1910), or both. Although he praises *Imperialism*'s political acuity, the British Trotskyist Tony Cliff, who regards it as primarily a work of popularisation, states the argument for the influence of Bukharin the most crudely: 'in terms of the actual description of modern capitalism, Lenin is not original at all, and

¹ CW 22:187.

borrows practically everything from Bukharin'.² The British Marxist sociologist Tom Bottomore writes in his introduction to the first English-language edition of Hilferding's book that 'Lenin based his study upon Hilferding's', but Bottomore argues as well that much of this influence was through Bukharin, who was himself influenced by Hilferding.³ One objection to the 'derivative' theory about Lenin's *Imperialism* is that if he were merely following earlier work, why would he have made nearly 800 pages of notes in large part in its preparation, mainly from original sources, and spent a full year preparing this study?

Also, at least in Lenin's view as seen in these private notebooks, his own perspective was different from that of Hilferding. There, in a remark that was likely connected to his Hegel Notebooks, Lenin terms Hilferding's book 'Kantian'.⁴ Elsewhere he details for himself four 'shortcomings' of Hilferding's analysis: '1) Theoretical error concerning money. 2) Ignores (almost) the division of the world. 3) Ignores the relationship between finance capital and parasitism. 4) Ignores the relationship between imperialism and opportunism'.⁵ Some scholars have suggested that Lenin agreed with Hilferding's economic theory but not with his political reformism, yet of these four criticisms, only the fourth could possibly be termed merely political rather than economic. Despite these objections to *Finance Capital*, however, it is fairly clear that one of Hilferding's arguments did exert influence on Lenin's *Imperialism*: the notion that the imperialist stage of capitalism was intimately connected to the increasing preponderance of finance over industrial capital. As Kautsky noted in a 1915 article, however, Hilferding avoids designating imperialism and monopoly as a special new stage of capitalism, as Lenin was to do: '[Hilferding] took very good care not to apply the already well-known word 'imperialism' to denote this most recent phase of capitalism. He too uses the word imperialism to refer to a particular kind of policy and not an 'economic phase'. For him, imperial-

2 Cliff 1975–9, Volume 2, p. 60. Stephen Cohen presents a similar but more nuanced argument in Cohen 1985.

3 Tom Bottomore, introduction to Hilferding 1985 [1910], p. 1. There is also Luxemburg's *Accumulation of Capital: A Contribution to an Explanation of Imperialism* (Luxemburg 1968 [1913]), but because of Lenin's evident disagreement with that work, few have argued that he was greatly influenced by it. For her part, Luxemburg judged Hilferding's book to be so superficial as to be beneath criticism. In a letter of 14 February 1913, to her close colleague and former lover Leo Jogiches, she seems to gloat over the fact that she did not include even one reference to Hilferding's study in her *Accumulation of Capital* and reports gleefully another colleague's disparagement of Hilferding's book as 'the work of an educated bank clerk'. See Luxemburg 1983, p. 266.

4 CW 39:334.

5 CW 39:202.

ism is the policy preferred by finance capital. I believe we have every reason to maintain this distinction between *finance capital as cause and imperialism as effect*.⁶ This type of procedure singled out by Kautsky was quite different from what Lenin did a bit later, when, in 1916, he completed his book on imperialism. Also, as we saw earlier, in his 1914–15 notebooks Lenin took up the Hegelian critique of causality, where cause and effect are dialectically interrelated. This may have distinguished his approach to the issues of finance capital, monopoly, and imperialism from those of the neo-Kantian Marxist Hilferding. Whereas Kautsky in the previously cited passage sees these phenomena in a unilinear cause-effect relationship, Lenin will pose them more as a dialectical totality.

Lenin's private and public criticisms of Bukharin's work on imperialism⁷ are more frequent than those against Hilferding's work. Lenin's critiques of Bukharin's *Imperialism and World Economy* are sometimes intertwined with his somewhat related differences with Bukharin over the issue of national liberation movements, movements that Bukharin dismissed as utopian and essentially reactionary in the era of imperialism. Robert Service notes that, in a somewhat distant preface for his young colleague's work written in December 1915 (but not published until 1927), Lenin also argues that 'Bukharin had exaggerated the degree of "planning" that had typified national industries' in the era of monopoly and imperialism.⁸ Lenin states this critique more explicitly in a 1919 speech, part of a polemic with Bukharin on the national question:

Comrade Bukharin's concreteness is a bookish description of finance capitalism. In reality we have heterogeneous phenomena to deal with. In every agricultural gubernia there is free competition side by side with monopoly industry. Nowhere in the world has monopoly capitalism existed in a whole series of branches without free competition, nor will it exist ... To maintain that there is such a thing as integral imperialism without the old capitalism is merely making the wish father to the thought ... And if we had an integral imperialism before us, which had entirely altered capitalism, our task would have been a hundred thousand times easier. It would have resulted in a system in which everything would be subordinated to finance capital alone.⁹

In sum, Lenin critiques Bukharin's theory of imperialism as essentially one-dimensional for the following reasons: (1) For Bukharin, imperialism does not

6 Kautsky 1983, p. 90; emphasis added.

7 Bukharin 1973 [1917].

8 Service 1991, p. 117.

9 *cw* 29:168.

engender any particularly new forms of opposition but instead tends to swallow up all opposition. (2) For Bukharin, monopoly capitalism and imperialism are more or less pure forms that had replaced the old competitive capitalism, rather than being the more variegated forms for which Lenin was arguing, where competition exists alongside monopoly.

Essentially Lenin charged Bukharin with holding to a more leftist version of Kautsky's notion that imperialism and centralisation of capital would, through central planning, create a type of economic unity that had an equilibrium and a stability and that was ripe for takeover *in toto* by socialism. Note the following critique of Kautsky's concept of 'ultra-imperialism' in Lenin's preface to Bukharin's *Imperialism and World Economy*: 'But this development proceeds in such circumstances, at such a pace, through such contradictions, conflicts and upheavals – not only economic but political, national etc. – that inevitably imperialism will burst and capitalism will be transformed into its opposite *long before* one world trust materialises, before the "ultra-imperialist" worldwide amalgamation of national finance capitals takes place'.¹⁰ This is one of the implicit critiques of Bukharin to which Service refers. Kautsky's position was similar also to Hilferding's celebrated argument in *Finance Capital* that one could make a great step toward socialism by 'taking possession of six large Berlin banks'.¹¹

In 1914 Kautsky wrote of the possibility of the great imperialist powers forming a sort of cartel once the war ended. He argued that although this would not mean the end of violence toward colonial peoples, it might mark the end of inter-imperialist rivalry manifested in wars and the arms race:

There is no economic necessity to continue the armaments race after world war, not even from the standpoint of the capitalist class itself ... Every far-sighted capitalist today must call to his comrades: Capitalists of the world, unite! ... From the purely economic standpoint, therefore, it is not excluded that capitalism may live through another new phase, the transference of the policy of cartels to foreign policy, *a phase of ultra-imperialism* ... Its dangers would lie in a different direction, not in that of the armaments race and the threat to world peace [emphasis added].¹²

Lenin sharply attacks this notion that the division of the world into spheres of interest by a small number of imperialist powers could lead to greater peace

¹⁰ CW 22:107.

¹¹ Hilferding 1985, p. 368.

¹² Kautsky 1983, pp. 86–8.

and stability. Seemingly Lenin viewed such theories as non-dialectical and evolutionary because they suggest that monopoly and imperialism, having introduced a degree of planning within capitalism, would help to make the transition to socialism easier and smoother. To Lenin, such arguments leave out the whole notion of contradiction, whereby the stronger and more centralised the state and the economy become, the deeper their internal contradictions run. Therefore, revolution is both more possible and more necessary the more centralised and modernised the state and the economy become. Some of these issues are explored further in the next chapter, when I discuss Lenin on the state and revolution.

Most writers on Lenin and imperialism have not brought Lenin's Hegel Notebooks into their analyses of his theory of imperialism.¹³ One exception was the French Marxist philosopher Roger Garaudy, who in a discussion of Lenin's Hegel Notebooks wrote that Bukharin's position on imperialism and national self-determination is 'an abstract and dogmatic thesis, taking account neither of the complex dialectic of history nor of the real aspirations of the masses'.¹⁴ More recently the American sovietologist Philip Pomper has suggested that Lenin's *Imperialism* 'probably owed something to the inspiration of dialectics as well as to an intensive reading of modern political economists'.¹⁵

Dunayevskaya has made the most forceful argument for the influence of the Hegel Notebooks on *Imperialism*:

As opposed to Bukharin's concept of capitalist growth in a straight line, or via a quantitative ratio, Lenin's own work holds on tightly to the dialectical principle, 'transformation into opposite'. The key point in tracing the *subject's* self-development instead of an 'objective' mathematical growth is that the former not only makes it possible to see transformation into opposite of both competitive capitalism into monopoly and part of labor into an aristocracy, but also makes you conscious that this is but the

13 General studies on the various Marxist theories of imperialism include Lichtheim 1971, Brewer 1980, Kiernan 1974, and Mommsen 1980. Most of these studies argue for the essential similarity of Lenin's, Bukharin's, and Hilferding's theories of imperialism. None of them addresses the point at issue here: the possible influence of Lenin's Hegel Notebooks on his theory of imperialism. Two more recent discussions critique Marx as a Eurocentrist but argue that Lenin overcame this problem within Marxism; see Birken 1991 and Seth 1992.

14 Garaudy 1968: 52. For more discussion of Garaudy, see Chapter 8.

15 Pomper, 1990, p. 230.

'first negative', to use an expression of Hegel's. The development through *this* compels finding the 'second negative', or as Marx expressed it, going 'lower and deeper' into the masses to find the *new* revolutionary forces. Thus, Lenin held that, *just when*, capitalism had reached this high stage of 'organisation', monopoly (which extended itself into imperialism), is the time to see new, national revolutionary forces that would act as 'bacilli' for proletarian revolutions as well.¹⁶

Taken together with Service's analysis of Lenin's introduction to Bukharin's book and Lenin's more explicit critiques of Bukharin, Dunayevskaya's argument has considerable force. Thus, although it is well known that Lenin sharply disagreed with Bukharin on political questions such as the self-determination of nations, and even on the economics of imperialism, there is often an assumption of a greater affinity between Lenin and Bukharin than actually exists.

The relationship of the text of Lenin's *Imperialism* to the Hegel Notebooks is not immediately apparent and must be excavated. First, it must be said that, unlike the essay 'Karl Marx' (1914), for example, this book does not have a section on dialectics or even one on philosophy. Nor does it even mention the issue of dialectics, as Lefebvre has noted.¹⁷ Therefore the question of its relationship to Lenin's studies of Hegelian dialectics lies not in specific references to dialectics or to Hegel; rather, the relationship must be uncovered in an examination of the book's form and central arguments.

Lenin begins with a detailed discussion of the extent of monopoly in the contemporary world economy, not only in Germany, but also in other industrialised countries. He notes that this shift from competitive to monopoly capitalism occurred around 1900, during the heyday of imperialism. He writes that 'competition becomes transformed into monopoly'¹⁸ and stresses the forceful, even violent character of this transformation: 'Monopoly hews a path for itself everywhere without scruple as to the means, from paying a modest sum to buy off competitors, to the American device of employing dynamite against them'.¹⁹ For Lenin, instead of monopoly capitalism producing a new 'equilibrium', violent competition between monopolies, whole industries, and national states increases rather than decreases at the same time that production becomes centralised into fewer and fewer hands: 'Domination, and the violence that is

16 Dunayevskaya 1992, pp. 118–19.

17 Lefebvre 1957, p. 239.

18 CW 22:205.

19 CW 22:208.

associated with it, such are the relationships that are typical of the “latest phase of capitalist development”; this is what inevitably had to result, and has resulted, from the formation of all-powerful economic monopolies.’²⁰ Lenin writes further: ‘The old struggle between small and big capital is being resumed at a new and immeasurably higher stage of development’.²¹ Thus, far from monopoly helping to overcome the social conflicts arising from the ‘anarchy of the market’, as was argued by the equilibrium theorists, in Lenin’s view anarchy and conflict do not disappear but return at a higher level once capital becomes more centralised. In Lenin’s model Marx’s crisis theory is upheld rather than vitiated by the appearance of monopoly and imperialism. This ‘highest stage of capitalism’ is rife with contradiction, conflict, and the possibility of self-destruction.

The key to everything for Lenin is transition, the development of monopoly and imperialism out of the old, smaller-scale competitive capitalism: ‘In other words, the old capitalism, the capitalism of free competition with its indispensable regulator, the Stock Exchange, is passing away. A new capitalism has come to take its place, bearing obvious features of something transient, a mixture of free competition and monopoly’.²² Contrary to Bukharin, whom, as we have seen, he accused of holding a concept of ‘integral imperialism without the old capitalism’,²³ Lenin here conceptualises a mixture of free competition and monopoly as the structure of capitalism in the age of imperialism.

The key point, however – with Lenin here following Hilferding to a great extent – is not only concentration within a given industry, such as steel, but also the predominance of finance over industrial capital: ‘It is characteristic of capitalism in general that the ownership of capital is separated from the application of capital to production ... Imperialism, or the domination of finance capital, is that highest stage of capitalism in which this separation reaches vast proportions. The supremacy of finance capital over all other forms of capital means the predominance of the rentier and the financial oligarchy; it means that a small number of financially “powerful” states stand out among all the rest’.²⁴ It is exactly here, however, where the connection of monopoly to financially powerful states is drawn, states that in 1916 were engaging in an

20 *CW* 22:207.

21 *CW* 22:224.

22 *CW* 22:219.

23 *CW* 29:168.

24 *CW* 22:238–9.

imperialist war for the purpose of re-dividing the world market, that Lenin goes beyond Hilferding, linking economics to politics more intimately than did the latter.

Again and again Lenin also criticises Kautsky's concept of ultra-imperialism. Kautsky, he writes, has

expressed the opinion that international cartels, being one of the most striking expressions of the internationalisation of capital, give the hope of peace among nations under capitalism. Theoretically, this opinion is absolutely absurd, while in practice it is sophistry and a dishonest defence of the worst opportunism ... To substitute the question of the form of the struggle and agreements (today peaceful, tomorrow warlike, the next day warlike again) for the question of the *substance* of the struggle and agreements between capitalist associations is to sink to the role of a sophist.²⁵

Far from subscribing to the notion that peace between nation-states is more likely under imperialism and monopoly, Lenin argues that the reverse is true, because the expanding empires, having virtually absorbed all the non-industrialised world, have nowhere to turn but on each other.

In this sense Kautsky's view is held to be non-dialectical and to show an insufficient awareness of the contradictory character of social reality. Lenin does not make recourse to such Hegelian terminology, however, but continues his economic argument: 'the characteristic feature of the period under review is the final partitioning of the globe – final, not in the sense that *repartition* is impossible; on the contrary, repartitions are possible and inevitable – but in the sense that the colonial policy of the capitalist countries has *completed* the seizure of the unoccupied territories on our planet. For the first time the world is completely divided up, so that in the future *only* redivision is possible'.²⁶ Lenin returns again and again to this concept of increased conflict and war between imperialist powers for repartition of the globe. Evidently World War I is the climax of such a conflict in Lenin's view.

Although *Imperialism* has no special section on dialectics, in the central and most important section of the book, entitled 'Imperialism, as a Special Stage of Capitalism', Lenin does make reference to the concept of transformation into opposite, one of the key categories from his 'Abstract of Hegel's *Science of Logic*'. He writes:

25 CW 22:252–3.

26 CW 22:254.

Imperialism emerged as the development and direct continuation of the fundamental characteristics of capitalism in general. But capitalism only became capitalist imperialism at a definite and very high stage of its development, when *certain of its fundamental characteristics began to change into their opposites*, when the features of the epoch of transition from capitalism to a higher social and economic system had taken shape and revealed themselves in all spheres ... *monopoly is the exact opposite of free competition*, but we have seen the latter being *transformed into monopoly* before our eyes, creating large-scale industry and forcing out small industry.²⁷

This passage is crucial in showing the relationship of Lenin's *Imperialism* to his Hegel Notebooks. His reference to characteristics that change into their opposites recalls key passages in his 'Abstract of Hegel's *Science of Logic*'. There, as we saw earlier, he had written: 'Dialectics is the doctrine of the *identity of opposites* – how they can be and how they become – under which conditions they become identical, transforming one into the other, – why the human mind must not take these opposites for dead, but for living, conditioned, mobile, transforming one into the other. In reading Hegel'.²⁸ This notion of a transformation into opposite as a key characteristic of dialectics was fundamental to the Hegel Notebooks.

In *Imperialism* Lenin seems to employ that dialectical category of transformation into opposite, derived from his study of Hegel, to analyse economic data. In Lenin's dialectical analysis of imperialism the transition from competitive capitalism to monopoly and imperialism is viewed not as a gradualist, evolutionary development but rather as a development through contradiction, through transformation into opposite. This explicit use of a category from the Hegel Notebooks does not occur in an obscure passage of Lenin's *Imperialism*. It comes at the beginning of 'Imperialism, as a Special Stage of Capitalism', a section where Lenin sums up his entire argument. The use of the dialectical category of transformation into opposite precedes almost directly one of *Imperialism*'s most crucial passages, Lenin's often-quoted elaboration of the five 'basic features' of imperialism:

- (1) the concentration of production and capital has developed to such a high stage that it has created monopolies which play a decisive role

²⁷ CW 22:265; emphasis added.

²⁸ CW 38:109.

in economic life; (2) the merging of bank capital with industrial capital, and the creation, on the basis of this 'finance capital', of a financial oligarchy; (3) the export of capital as distinguished from the export of commodities acquires exceptional importance; (4) the formation of international monopolist capitalist associations which share the world among themselves, and (5) the territorial division of the whole world among the biggest capitalist powers is completed.²⁹

Although many scholars have commented on this passage, few have related it to Lenin's discussion of the dialectical concept of transformation into opposite, a discussion that, as we have seen, almost directly precedes it in Lenin's text. Lenin has stressed that the transition from competitive capitalism to monopoly and imperialism is not a gradual process but a sudden diremption, since 'monopoly is the exact opposite of free competition'.³⁰ Most of Lenin's five basic features of imperialism refer to the greater centralisation of capital, but as we have seen, in Lenin's concept of imperialism the old conflicts of competitive capitalism transform into their opposites and reappear at a higher level, where they are even more destructive and destabilising. Thus, although the work confines itself almost entirely to economic issues, there is this one major reference to the concept of transformation into opposite, a key dialectical concept developed in the Hegel Notebooks.

Finally, there are a few guarded references to another way in which Lenin's theory of imperialism is dialectical: national liberation movements stand as a dialectical opposite to imperialism. In this sense, a new development in capitalism, monopoly and imperialism, engenders a new form of opposition, and the Hegelian-Marxian theory of subjectivity, contradiction, and negation holds. Before turning to that issue at greater length, however, I will examine briefly the massive, preparatory, posthumously published *Notebooks on Imperialism*.

2 *Notebooks on Imperialism*

In *Notebooks on Imperialism* we see more explicit references to, and studies of, dialectics. Thus, near the beginning of these notebooks, Hegel's *Phenomenology* is listed as a book apparently consulted by Lenin³¹ – but if he made notes on

29 CW 22:266.

30 CW 22:265.

31 CW 39:31.

that book they have not been published. *Notebooks on Imperialism* also shows that Lenin kept up some Hegel studies even as he began to study imperialism in detail.³²

Although the work of Luxemburg is not referred to in *Imperialism*, the notebooks show that Lenin devoted more space (7 pages) to his summary of her anti-war *Junius Pamphlet* than to any other single source. In a few other cases, such as that of J.A. Hobson's *Imperialism* (1902), the summaries are even longer, but it is indicated that these were made by Krupskaya and not Lenin. Bukharin is not discussed, and Hilferding gets merely five pages. In general *Notebooks on Imperialism* contains far briefer entries than the more detailed summaries and reflections in the Hegel Notebooks. Was this because Lenin is more interested here in recording factual material than in grappling with key concepts?

There is also quite a bit of material on the national question, ranging from extracts from Marx and Engels on that subject to discussions of racism and national oppression in the twentieth century, including discussions of Blacks in the United States. In fact, the last several hundred pages of *Notebooks on Imperialism* are really not on the economics of imperialism but on the political questions that Lenin largely had to leave out of *Imperialism*. They also contain lengthy discussions of racism and national chauvinism inside the socialist movement itself. Some of this material consists of extracts from Marx and Engels. Again, this material was intended for broader uses than just as preparation for *Imperialism*, which Lenin intended to publish under tsarist censorship.

In his uncensored article 'Imperialism and the Split in Socialism', published in 1916 in an exile Bolshevik journal, Lenin recapitulates in a briefer format the main theses of *Imperialism*. Here he also sharpens considerably his critique of reformist socialism and his vision of new revolutionary opposition inside the imperialist countries:

Now a '*bourgeois labor party*' is inevitable and typical in *all* imperialist countries ... For the trusts, the financial oligarchy, high prices, etc., while enabling the bribery of a handful in the top layers, are increasingly oppressing, crushing, ruining and torturing the *mass* of the proletariat and the semi-proletariat. On the one hand there is the tendency of the bourgeoisie and the opportunists to convert a handful of very rich and privileged nations into 'eternal' parasites on the body of the rest of mankind, to 'rest on the laurels' of the exploitation of Negroes, Indians, etc., keeping them in subjection with the aid of the excellent weapons of

32 CW 39:174.

extermination provided by modern militarism. On the other hand, there is the tendency of the *masses* who are more oppressed than before and who bear the whole brunt of imperialist war to cast off this yoke and to overthrow the bourgeoisie.³³

Nonetheless, it is not merely the issue of new revolutionary opposition in general due to impoverishment and war that is at stake here. For Lenin, what emerges is not only a new privileged stratum of workers but also a major contradiction that reveals one of the dialectical opposites of imperialism: the revolutionary 'lower and deeper' layers of the industrial working class and the unemployed. For if part of the working class also transforms into its opposite, into a labour aristocracy, as a whole this new working class under imperialism is hardly characterised by stability and passivity. Instead, the working class becomes differentiated into, in Lenin's famous phrase, an 'aristocracy of labour' and what he considered to be a more revolutionary lower and deeper layer.

Lenin was late in entering the debate on imperialism raging in European Marxism from 1910 to 1914 and involving the major theorists of the Second International, such as Kautsky and Hilferding, as well as Luxemburg. It appears that he sought in 1914–17 to become not only a leading *political* figure in world Marxism, helping to regroup the revolutionary left after the breakup of the Second International, but also a leading *theorist*, not just for Russia but for the world movement. As Service notes, Lenin discussed mainly Britain and Germany in *Imperialism*, whereas 'the bulk of his reading was in German' and 'even the notebooks have little on Romanov lands'.³⁴ Thus, more than tsarist censorship may have kept Lenin from focusing the book on Russia: Russian capitalism had not reached the world stage of monopoly and imperialism. The path of Lenin's theoretical writings in 1914–17 – from notes on Hegel, to writings on imperialism and the self-determination of nations, and finally, to his theorising on the state and revolution – was a very new one. Not only was it a sharp break with his own past concentration on Russia and East Europe, but it was also a break with the mainstream of European orthodox social democratic Marxism.

Unfortunately, discussions of Lenin's work have tended too often to separate *Imperialism's* theorising not only from Lenin's Hegel Notebooks but even from his other writings on the war and especially on the self-determination of nations. This is despite the fact that, as I mentioned at the beginning of this

33 CW 23:116.

34 Service 1991, p. 113.

to be kept separate by Marxist (and non-Marxist) theorists: the national and the colonial questions.³⁹

I will also argue that anti-imperialist movements for national liberation were to Lenin nothing less than the dialectical opposite of the new capitalist stage marked by monopoly and imperialism. In Lenin's view part of the Western working class had been 'bribed' by the 'crumbs' from imperialism, especially in Britain, and capitalism thus emerged all the stronger after 1900, at least temporarily. For Lenin, however, it was equally true that the new stage contained its own opposite: the revolt from both the lower and deeper layer of the working class inside the imperialist countries and the still newer revolutionary subject, the national liberation movements.

To view Lenin's 1914–23 writings on national liberation in this manner, it is first necessary to clear up some of the misconceptions surrounding the whole issue of the national question within Marxism. It is often claimed, erroneously, that Marx showed little concern for anti-colonial movements.⁴⁰ Marx's work, however, especially in his last decade, contains many elements showing that anti-imperialist national movements were indeed of major importance for his overall theory of revolution. These later writings call into question the notion, often attributed to Marx, of the unitary development of history according to a single grand universal in which national particularities would be completely swallowed up. It is true that, in the *Communist Manifesto*, Marx and Engels write that 'the bourgeoisie has through its exploitation of the world market given a cosmopolitan character to production and consumption in every country' and that 'the cheap prices of its commodities are the heavy artillery with which it batters down all Chinese walls, with which it forces the barbarians' intensely obstinate hatred of foreigners to capitulate'.⁴¹ But there is no need to read this statement, as some have, as necessarily applauding such developments. Instead, I suggest that Marx is working in the Hegelian tradition, sketching out a particular form of society and thought in an objective manner, including its achievements, before launching into a discussion of its contradictions and weakness. This type of procedure can be observed throughout Hegel's *Phenomenology*.⁴²

39 Seth 1992 makes this argument very forcefully.

40 Mainstream scholars often criticise Marx on this basis. See Pipes 1964, and Connor 1984. Supporters of Luxemburg's position on the national question have often given a similar account of Marx's position, but without the criticisms; see, for example, Davis 1978, and the earlier Davis 1967.

41 Marx and Engels 1975–2004, vol. 6, p. 488.

42 For example, Hegel's critique of Enlightenment reason begins by seeming to identify with

Some of Marx's other writings show a strong commitment to national liberation. In an often-cited letter of April 9, 1870, he describes Irish national liberation as a precondition for the self-emancipation of the British working class:

After studying the Irish question for years I have come to the conclusion that the decisive blow against the ruling classes in England (and this is decisive for the workers' movement *all over the world*) cannot be struck in England, but *only in Ireland* ... It is, therefore, the task of the '*International*' to bring the conflict between England and Ireland to the forefront everywhere, and to side with Ireland publicly everywhere. The special task of the Central Council in London is to awaken the consciousness of the English working class that, *for them, the national emancipation of Ireland is not a question of abstract justice or humanitarian sentiment, but the first condition of their own social emancipation.*⁴³

Marx had a similar position toward Polish independence, but here it was Engels who expressed himself the most forcefully, this time in an 1882 critique of those socialists who played down the importance of national liberation:

Polish socialists who do not place the liberation of their country at the head of their program, appear to me as would German socialists who do not demand first and foremost repeal of the [anti]socialist law, freedom of the press, association and assembly ... It is unimportant whether a reconstitution of Poland is possible before the next revolution. *We* have in no case the task to deter the Poles from their efforts to fight for the vital conditions of their future development, or to persuade them that national independence is a very secondary matter from the international point of view. On the contrary, independence is the basis of any common international action.⁴⁴

Engels also critiqued Russian socialists, among whom, he said, 'only very few ... are free from Panslavist leanings or memories.'⁴⁵

the struggle of the Enlightenment against 'superstition' but ends with a sharp critique of the 'absolute freedom and terror' during the French Revolution, an outcome that Hegel lays at the door of Enlightenment reason. See Hegel 1977 [1807], pp. 328–63.

43 Marx and Engels 1975–2004, vol. 43, p. 473–5.

44 Engels, 'Nationalism, Internationalism and the Polish Question' (orig. German edition 1882), in Marx and Engels 1952, p. 117.

45 Ibid., p. 118.

Finally, Marx's last writings, produced during 1872–83, show a heightened interest in and sensitivity to what is today termed the Third World. In this period Marx wrote his famous drafts for a letter to the Russian revolutionary Vera Zasulich. In the letter he argues that Russia might be able to use its traditional rural common ownership of land as 'the fulcrum for a social regeneration'.⁴⁶ This type of thinking is also seen in his *Ethnological Notebooks*,⁴⁷ which were not published until the 1970s and therefore unknown to Lenin and his generation. There, Marx took up communal peasant and pastoral societies in Australia, India, Ireland, and North America, among others.

Although Marx's *Ethnological Notebooks* and many of his other later writings on non-Western society remained unpublished and thus were for the most part unknown to Lenin's generation of Marxists, his views on self-determination for Poland and Ireland were quite well known. Luxemburg maintained that the rise of the national bourgeoisie in Poland had rendered Marx's position favouring Polish independence outdated. In her lengthy essay 'The National Question and Autonomy', originally published in 1908, she argues that there was really no national question for Marxism, since nations were divided into classes.⁴⁸ Kautsky and the orthodox leadership of the Second International tended toward a position midway between that of Marx and Luxemburg: pro forma advocacy of national self-determination, but without, as Georges Haupt notes, 'giving it particular emphasis'.⁴⁹ In a letter to Victor Adler, Kautsky is less circumspect, this

46 Shanin (ed.) 1983, p. 124. This collection includes many key writings by Marx, Engels, and their Russian contemporaries, with chapters analysing their significance by Shanin, Haruki Wada, and Derek Sayer and Philip Corrigan.

47 Marx 1972b. The present edition of these notebooks, although great for specialists, is difficult for general readers to use, since Krader transcribed rather than translated them. He left Marx's multilingual notes, which include passages in English, German, and Greek, in their original languages. A German translation appeared in the 1970s, and an English translation is forthcoming from Yale University Press, edited by David Norman Smith. For discussions, see Krader's lengthy introduction to the *Ethnological Notebooks* and Dunayevskaya 1991 [1982]. See also Anderson 1983, my article on the French edition of *Capital* and Hudis 1983.

48 See Luxemburg 1976.

49 'Les Marxistes face à la question nationale: l'histoire du problème', in Haupt et al. 1974:27. This collection of writings by Marx, Engels, Kautsky, Bauer, Renner, Luxemburg, Lenin, Pannekoek, and others, which also includes important essays by Haupt and Löwy, provides the best overview of these debates. Unfortunately, it does not cover anything after 1914. See also Weill 1990. The whole debate over the national question in early twentieth-century Marxism was a particularly rich one. In her recent article 'Self-Determination and War: The Case of Yugoslavia' (Magas 1993) the Croatian-born historian Branka Magas, for many years a member of the editorial board of *New Left Review*, makes this point as part of her scathing critique of the failure of today's Left to come to grips adequately with the geno-

time explicitly rejecting Marx's positions: 'On the oriental question as on the Polish question, I am of the opinion that the old position of Marx has become untenable. ... It would be perfectly non-Marxist to close one's eyes before the facts and to continue to hold to the outmoded point of view of Marx'.⁵⁰ For the orthodox leadership, but not for the leftist revolutionary Luxemburg, this also meant, over the years, a softening of their attitude toward imperialism. Despite Kautsky's bold statements against colonialism in his 1909 work, *The Road to Power*, by 1910 Luxemburg was accusing him of censoring her critiques of German imperialism in his capacity as editor of *Die neue Zeit*.

Besides Lenin's writings on the national question during and after the war, the most substantial effort by Marxists of his generation to explore this issue, at least with regard to Europe, was that of the Austro-Marxist theorists, especially Otto Bauer and Karl Renner. Their philosophical ground, however, was far different from that of Lenin. According to Bottomore, 'influenced above all by neo-Kantianism and by the ideas of Ernst Mach they showed a close affinity, in their general outlook and pre-occupations, with the new positivist doctrines which later assumed a distinctive form in the Vienna circle'.⁵¹ The Austro-Marxists posited a definition of the nation that was not tied to a specific geographic territory, or even necessarily to a common language. Bauer writes: 'The nation is the totality of human beings bound together through a common destiny into a community of character. Through a common destiny: this characteristic distinguishes the nation from the international character groupings, such as an occupation, a class, or the members of a state, which rest upon a similarity, not a community, of destiny'. He writes further that a nation is 'a natural and cultural community that is determined by its own destiny'.⁵² He advocated national and cultural autonomy for such groups within a multinational political order and called for preservation of the 'wealth of our national cultures',

cide in Bosnia: 'In contrast to an earlier generation of socialists, whose best theoreticians tackled with knowledge and sophistication the national questions arising out of the break-up of the pre-1914 European Empires, the left today – at least in the imperialist states – has proved profoundly conservative and barren' (p. 103).

50 See Kautsky's letter of 12 November 1896, to Victor Adler in Adler 1954, p. 221.

51 Bottomore and Goode (eds.) 1978, p. 3.

52 Bauer 1975, p. 194. See also Renner 1918. In the 1970s Kolakowski wrote that 'Bauer's book on the question of nationality is seldom read nowadays' (Kolakowski 1975, p. 285). This may be changing. In 1979 the major Mexican publisher Siglio XXI brought out a Spanish-language edition, and a French one with an introduction by Claudie Weill appeared in 1987. See also two discussions of Bauer in English-language leftist journals, both of which rely on the Spanish edition: Munck 1985, pp. 84–97; and Forman 1992, pp. 41–8.

making them into 'a possession of the whole nation'.⁵³ Socialism would allow the working people to participate fully in national life and culture for the first time.

As early as 1903 the Russian social democratic programme referred simply and briefly to the 'right of self-determination for all nations entering into the composition of the state'.⁵⁴ Lenin's writings over the next decade were mainly defences of this position against either the Bundists, who favoured national and cultural autonomy, or the Luxemburgists, who opposed national self-determination from a leftist perspective. Until 1914 these writings were of a generally formalistic nature. For example, in a brief 1903 article, 'The National Question in Our Program', although supporting the right of self-determination, Lenin wrote that 'we must subordinate the demand for national self-determination' to the 'class struggle of the proletariat'.⁵⁵ Later he began to take more of an interest in the theoretical debates over the national question. As Carrère d'Encausse notes: 'In 1912, Lenin reflected at length on the writings of the Austro-Marxists and read a great number of works on minorities in the Russian empire, especially on the Jews and the Ukrainians'.⁵⁶ During this period he also became more interested in the revolutionary movements outside Europe and began to discuss them in a series of articles, as can be seen in his 1913 article, 'The Historical Destiny of the Doctrine of Karl Marx', published on the thirtieth anniversary of Marx's death. In this article Lenin refers to 'revolutions in Turkey, Persia and China' that, he argues, belie the reform socialists' notion of gradual and evolutionary change.⁵⁷ In a well-known article entitled 'The Awakening of Asia', also published in 1913, he writes: 'Following the 1905 movement in Russia, the democratic revolution spread to the whole of Asia – to Turkey, Persia, China'.⁵⁸ A few weeks later, in his article 'Backward Europe and Advanced Asia', he argues that although Asia was in the throes of a democratic revolution, the European bourgeoisie was supporting reactionary and traditionalist forces.⁵⁹ I should note however that for Lenin at this time, anticolonial movements were part of the 'democratic' but not the socialist revolution, thus in need of support by socialists but not on a par with the struggles of the working class. Of course, according to the Marxist orthodoxy of the pre-1917

53 Bauer 1975, p. 622.

54 Cited in Carr 1950, p. 418.

55 *CW* 6:454.

56 Carrère d'Encausse 1987, p. 48.

57 *CW* 18:584.

58 *CW* 19:85.

59 *CW* 19:99–100.

period, which Lenin shared, even the impending Russian Revolution was to be democratic and bourgeois rather than socialist. In a lengthier piece, 'Critical Remarks on the National Question' (1913), Lenin opposes the notion of an official national language for Russia but attacks equally vehemently the 'slogan of national culture' as a 'bourgeois fraud'.⁶⁰ After critiquing both the Bund and the Austro-Marxists, he concludes: 'Marxism cannot be reconciled with nationalism, be it even of the 'most just', 'purest', most refined and civilised brand'.⁶¹

The best-known example of Lenin's writings on the national question before his Hegel studies and the new situation created by World War I is his lengthy article 'The Right of Nations to Self-Determination', published in the spring of 1914. Here Lenin's critique is focused on those who would dismiss the question of national self-determination as no longer valid for socialists. Most of the article debates Luxemburg on the relationship of the national question to Russia and Eastern Europe. Several lengthy sections also take up Marx and Engels on Poland and Ireland. Lenin also writes: 'Can a nation be free if it oppresses other nations? It cannot. The interests of the freedom of the Great-Russian population require a struggle against such oppression. ... The Great-Russian Black Hundreds⁶² deliberately foster these prejudices and encourage them. The Great-Russian bourgeoisie tolerates or condones them. The Great-Russian proletariat cannot achieve its own aims or clear the road to its freedom without systematically countering these prejudices'.⁶³ In the same article, however, while writing of 'the tasks of national liberation',⁶⁴ Lenin, like Kautsky, separates himself from Marx's position supporting Polish independence, which he argues was outdated due to 'the extreme nationalism of the Polish petty bourgeoisie'.⁶⁵ He also agrees with Kautsky's position that conditions in Ireland had changed greatly since Marx's day.

4 Lenin on the Dialectics of National Liberation, 1916–17

In his 1916 review of Luxemburg's antiwar *Junius Pamphlet*, as shown in the previous chapter, Lenin accuses Luxemburg of being only halfway dialectical for opposing the war and imperialism while remaining equally opposed to all forms of nationalism, including anti-imperialist national movements. We also

60 CW 20:23.

61 CW 20:34.

62 These were rightist and anti-Semitic nationalists, often involved in fomenting pogroms.

63 CW 20:413.

64 CW 20:432.

65 CW 20:433.

saw that in making this argument, Lenin once again refers to the concept of transformation into opposite, which he first developed in his Hegel Notebooks. In addition, although he does not refer to this point explicitly, what may also be at issue here and elsewhere in Lenin's post-1914 writings on national liberation is another dialectical concept from the Hegel Notebooks: the notion that the particular and the universal can exchange places. In this sense, during World War I, socialism would be seen as the universal and national liberation as a particular. Lenin is accusing his opponents on the national question of refusing to see what he had pointed to in his Hegel Notebooks as he discussed the syllogism: 'From a certain point of view, under certain conditions, the universal is the particular, the particular is the universal'.⁶⁶ In this sense, national liberation movements can 'under certain conditions' become a pathway to socialism.

In the crucial year 1916, the bulk of his published and unpublished articles were on the question of national liberation. The first major piece is the article 'The Socialist Revolution and the Right of Nations to Self-Determination, Theses', published in April 1916, where for the first time Lenin connects the possibility of social revolution with his support for national self-determination: 'The socialist revolution may flare up not only through some big strike, street demonstration or hunger riot or a military insurrection *or colonial revolt*, but also as a result of a political crisis such as the Dreyfus Case or the Zabern⁶⁷ incident, *or in connection with a referendum on the secession of an oppressed nation, etc.*'⁶⁸ He expands this further, connecting self-determination with his concept of revolution: 'The proletariat of the oppressor nations must not confine themselves to general, stereotyped phrases against annexation and in favor of the equality of nations in general. ... The proletariat must demand freedom of political separation for the colonies and nations oppressed by "their own" nation. Otherwise, the internationalism of the proletariat would be nothing but empty words'.⁶⁹ This is far beyond the formalistic positions of the Second International, including Lenin's own pre-1914 writings.

Lenin acknowledges openly that he is not merely repeating old concepts, even Bolshevik ones. Old positions 'should be supplemented', he writes, because of 'the particular urgency of this demand under imperialism'.⁷⁰ What is still more important is that he is no longer confining his debate over self-

66 CW 38:177.

67 This refers to the protests by the mainly French population that broke out against the Prussian military in Zabern, Alsace, in November 1913.

68 CW 22:145; emphasis added.

69 CW 22:147–48.

70 CW 22:155.

determination to Russian and Eastern European questions, as he did before 1914: in search of an international leftist audience, Lenin published this article not in Russian but in German. It discusses the question of self-determination at the level of the world revolutionary movement and world imperialism.

Lenin wrote these theses on national self-determination without giving a concrete example of a national revolution in the era of modern imperialism. Just as his theses came off the press, however, the Easter Rebellion broke out in Dublin, and it was taken up a few months later in a lengthier article Lenin published in Russian entitled 'The Discussion of Self-Determination Summed Up'. He begins by summarising the views of his opponents: 'We are told in reply that "the right of self-determination is not applicable to a socialist society"', which Lenin calls 'an attempt to evade political questions'.⁷¹ He argues further that 'in transforming capitalism into socialism the proletariat creates the *possibility* of abolishing national oppression' but concludes that this becomes a reality only with full national freedom, 'including complete freedom to secede'.⁷²

Although he terms his Polish and Dutch opponents 'among the best revolutionary and internationalist elements in international Social-Democracy', he calls their position opposing the self-determination of nations 'imperialist economism'.⁷³ He notes that these opponents, who include the Dutch theorists Anton Pannekoek and Herman Gorter, as well as Karl Radek and Luxemburg, are generally closer to his positions than are reformists who in his view support self-determination only verbally.

In his discussion of Ireland in this article, Lenin is responding especially to Luxemburg's former colleague Karl Radek, by this point a Bolshevik, who had dismissed the Easter Rebellion as a 'putsch' and the Sinn Féin Irish nationalist movement as having 'little social backing'.⁷⁴ Lenin argues:

The term 'putsch', in its scientific sense, may be employed only when the attempt at insurrection has revealed nothing but a circle of conspirators or stupid maniacs, and has aroused no sympathy among the masses. The centuries-old Irish national movement, having passed through various stages and combinations of class interest ... manifested itself in street fighting conducted by a section of the urban petty bourgeoisie *and a section of the workers* after a long period of mass agitation, demonstrations, suppression of newspapers, etc. Whoever calls *such* a rebellion a 'putsch'

71 CW 22:321.

72 CW 22:325.

73 CW 22:348.

74 See Karl Radek, 'The Song Is Played Out', in Riddell (ed.) 1984, pp. 374–5.

is either a hardened reactionary, or a doctrinaire hopelessly incapable of envisaging a social revolution as a living phenomenon.⁷⁵

In this view of social revolution as a living phenomenon Lenin includes not only the revolt of the industrial working class but also 'revolts by small nations in the colonies and in Europe', as well as peasant revolts against landowners. 'To imagine that social revolution is conceivable without' these new elements outside the industrial working class 'is to repudiate social revolution', he concludes.

It is also here that Lenin, referring explicitly once again to the issue of dialectics, sums up briefly what is original and new in his concept of national revolution in the era of imperialism: 'The dialectics of history are such that small nations, powerless as an *independent* factor in the struggle against imperialism, play a part as one of the ferments, one of the bacilli, which help the *real* anti-imperialist force, the socialist proletariat, to make its appearance on the scene'.⁷⁶ Here he seems to view the national revolutions as an independent revolutionary subject (if not alongside the working class, then certainly 'one of the bacilli') that helps to bring on the socialist revolution. Lenin's theory of imperialism has become dialectical in the sense of pointing not only to the economic side of imperialism but also to a *a new revolutionary subject* arising from within global imperialism: national liberation movements.

Lenin's position was distinct not only from those of other contemporary Marxists but also from his own earlier writings. As the American sovietologist Alfred G. Meyer argues: 'Lenin picked up a strand from the fabric of Marxist thought which had been forgotten or neglected by Marxist theorists in the West, but which was of great importance to Marx and Engels themselves. Witness their support of the Irish movement of rebellion against England, the Polish movements of liberation, and similar currents in world politics of their day'.⁷⁷ In this sense, as in his return to Hegel, Lenin was going back to Marx even as he was sharply critiquing contemporary versions of Marxism.

There is an important body of work, totaling sixty-three pages and left unpublished during Lenin's lifetime, wherein he deepened still further his critiques of other leftist revolutionaries who disagreed with his position on the

75 CW 22:354.

76 CW 22:357.

77 Meyer 1957, p. 149. Unfortunately, Meyer virtually excludes the Hegel Notebooks from his study of Lenin's thought. His brief discussion of them is surprisingly superficial, seeing, for example, the Hegelian notion of totality as 'correlative' to the mainstream sociological notion of 'functionalism' (p. 10).

question of national self-determination. These writings against what Lenin termed 'imperialist economism' were not published in 1916, in large part because of opposition to his views even among fellow leftist revolutionary opponents of the war. Nor were they published even after the revolution, despite a speech in 1917 where Lenin complained of the fact.⁷⁸ Of course, all that changed after Lenin's death, as Stalin moved to finish off his last major opponent, Bukharin. Stalin 'discovered' and published these articles in 1929 because they quite sharply criticise Bukharin, by then his rival for leadership.

In these writings Lenin laments that by late 1916, Bukharin, initially isolated within Bolshevism on his position against national self-determination, had gained an international following, including Polish and Dutch revolutionary internationalists. In their rival 'Theses on the Right of Self-Determination', the Bukharin group had written the following:

The imperialist epoch is an epoch of the absorption of small states by the large state units and of a constant reshuffling of the political map of the world toward a more uniform type of state; in the process of this absorption many nations are incorporated into the state system of the victorious nations. ... The slogan of 'self-determination of nations' is first of all *utopian* (it cannot be realised *within the limits* of capitalism) and harmful as a slogan which *disseminates illusions*. In this respect it does not differ at all from the slogans of the courts of arbitration, of disarmament, etc., which presuppose the possibility of so-called 'peaceful capitalism'.⁷⁹

To be sure, the Bukharin group regarded colonial revolts as well-intentioned, but it saw them as illusory in an era when imperialism would inevitably triumph over such revolts, which were seen as vestiges of pre-capitalist formations on their way out. In such a political-economic framework, nationalism could only be reactionary, and the task of socialists was simply to promote internationalism.

In his response Lenin comes close to portraying national liberation movements as a form of revolutionary subjectivity as important as the labour movement in bringing about revolution, writing of a 'combined civil war' by both of these forces:

⁷⁸ CW 24:299.

⁷⁹ 'Theses and Program of the Bukharin-Piatakoff Group, November 1915', in Gankin and Fisher (eds.) 1940, p. 219.

While the proletariat of the advanced countries is overthrowing the bourgeoisie and repelling its attempts at counter-revolution, the undeveloped and oppressed nations do not just wait, do not cease to exist, do not disappear ... The social revolution can come only in the form of an epoch in which are combined civil war by the proletariat against the bourgeoisie in the advanced countries and a whole series of democratic and revolutionary movements, including the national liberation movement, in the undeveloped, backward and oppressed nations. Why? Because capitalism develops unevenly, and objective reality gives us highly developed capitalist nations side by side with a number of economically slightly developed or totally undeveloped nations.⁸⁰

In addition, Lenin accuses the Bukharin group of wanting to impose a uniform culture and politics of 'monotonous grey' on all humanity: 'All nations will arrive at socialism ... but all will do so in not exactly the same way, each will contribute something of its own to some form of democracy, to some variety of the dictatorship of the proletariat, to the varying rate of socialist transformations in the different aspects of social life. There is nothing more primitive from the viewpoint of theory, or more ridiculous from that of practice, than to paint, "in the name of historical materialism", *this* aspect of the future in monotonous grey'.⁸¹ This article, not published until after his death, is the culmination of Lenin's writings on national self-determination during the period preceding the Russian Revolution.

I have shown that the question of the self-determination of nations was perhaps the chief source of political controversy between Lenin and other internationalist Marxists, including Bolsheviks, during 1915 and especially 1916. I have also argued that, for Lenin, national liberation was, in Hegelian language, the dialectical opposite of the new stage of imperialism reached by capitalism as it was transformed into monopoly. Although Lenin had for many years articulated a position on the national question within Russian and Eastern European Marxism, it was hardly at the centre of his Marxism.

In 1916 the question of the self-determination of nations in the era of imperialism did become central for Lenin. During 1914–17 he wrote more pages on that than on anything other than Hegel. It is a curious picture. We see a public, political Lenin involved in endless disputes over the question of national self-determination with his comrades, including important theorists who were his

80 CW 23:60.

81 CW 23:69–70.

political allies, such as Bukharin and Luxemburg. The same Lenin, who was the only prominent Marxist political leader to study Hegel intensively during this period, also developed the concept of a new revolutionary subject, national liberation movements, as the dialectical opposite brought onto the historic stage by the new stage of imperialism and monopoly.

5 Continuation of the Debates over National Liberation after the Revolution

Lenin's discussions of national liberation did not stop after his return to Russia in 1917 but continued until his death. This issue was probably the principal cause of his deathbed break with Stalin as they argued over the national question in Georgia in late 1922.⁸² There are literally dozens of letters, articles, and speeches devoted entirely or in part to national self-determination, discussing its ramifications either inside Russia or in the dialectics of world revolution. Although quite a few of these statements occurred at the beginning of the revolution, several important ones can be found in Lenin's last writings as well. In the following discussion I treat these writings as a corpus of theoretical ideas. My concern here is not so much their immediate effect on the policies of the new Soviet state but rather their broader significance as theoretical writings within the Marxist tradition. Thus, the issue of whether Lenin actually implemented these concepts in the Soviet Union after 1917, or even attempted to do so in a serious way, will be to a great extent left aside.⁸³

In a 1917 speech, arguing against other Bolsheviks such as Bukharin, Lenin stated:

If Finland, Poland or Ukraine secede from Russia there is nothing bad in that. What is wrong with it? Anyone who says that is a chauvinist. One must be mad to continue Tsar Nicholas' policy. Didn't Norway secede from Sweden? Alexander I and Napoleon once bartered nations, the Tsars once

82 See Lewin 1968.

83 There have been many studies of Russian Communism and the national question, most of them focusing on the relationship of political and theoretical concerns to the future shape of the Soviet Union. All these writers argue, to one degree or another, that the eventual shape of the Soviet Union under Stalin diverged from Lenin's conceptions with regard to the national question. See especially Pipes 1964; Carrère d'Encausse 1987; and Simon 1991.

traded Poland. Are we to continue this policy of the Tsars? This is repudiation of the tactics of internationalism, this is chauvinism at its worst. What is wrong with Finland seceding? ... Any Russian socialist who does not recognise Finland's and Ukraine's right to freedom will degenerate into a chauvinist. And no sophisms or references to his 'method' will ever help him to justify himself.⁸⁴

In 1919, as some of these debates continued after the revolution, Lenin stated in another speech: 'Scratch some Communists and you will find Great-Russian chauvinists'.⁸⁵ The other Bolshevik leaders and theorists never accepted fully Lenin's position on national self-determination, and they lived to see Stalin use national chauvinism as one of his paths to power.

Especially important were Lenin's 'Theses on the National and Colonial Questions', which he presented to the 1920 Second Congress of the Communist International. In these theses he argues that the direct democracy of peasant soviets⁸⁶ as a form of revolutionary organisation has relevance even for precapitalist lands without a significant working class. He also asserts forcefully the notion that non-capitalist lands do not have to pass through capitalist industrialisation before moving toward socialism:

The Communist International's theses should point out that peasants' Soviets, Soviets of the exploited, are a weapon which can be employed, not only in capitalist countries but also in countries with pre-capitalist relations. ... The question was posed as follows: are we to consider as correct the assertion that the capitalist stage of economic development is inevitable for backward nations now on the road to emancipation ...? We replied in the negative ... the Communist International should advance the proposition, with the appropriate theoretical grounding, that with the aid of the proletariat of the advanced countries, backward countries can go over to the Soviet system and, through certain stages of development, to communism, without having to pass through the capitalist stage.⁸⁷

84 *CW* 24:300-1.

85 *CW* 29:194.

86 His conceptualisation of soviets (councils) as new forms of revolutionary subjectivity on the part of workers and peasants is analysed in Chapter 6.

87 *CW* 31:244.

Much of this thinking made its way into the founding documents of the Comintern. These and other formulations by Lenin were crucially important in extending the influence of Marxism and the Russian Revolution into the Third World.⁸⁸

Finally, in Lenin's 1922–3 dispute with Stalin, which culminated in his famous 'Will', he also dictated from his deathbed the following material in an article entitled 'The Question of Nationalities or Autonomisation', which is worth quoting extensively:

It is said that a united apparatus was needed. ... Did it not come from that same Russian apparatus which, as I pointed out in one of the preceding sections of my diary, we took over from Tsarism and slightly anointed with Soviet oil? ... It is quite natural that in such circumstances *the 'freedom to secede from the union' by which we justify ourselves will be a mere scrap of paper*, unable to defend the non-Russians from the onslaught of that really Russian man, the Great-Russian chauvinist ... A distinction must necessarily be made between the nationalism of an oppressor nation and that of an oppressed nation, the nationalism of a big nation and that of a small nation ... 'offended' nationals are not sensitive to anything so much as to the feeling of equality and the violation of this equality, if only through negligence or jest ... political responsibility for all this truly Great-Russian nationalist campaign must, of course, be laid on Stalin and Dzerzhinsky.⁸⁹

Never before had Lenin called the Bolshevik policy on self-determination a scrap of paper. Such was an indication of how far he felt Soviet reality had moved from his theoretical concept of national liberation.

As the political theorist Wolfgang Leonhard wrote in a semi-autobiographical analysis of Lenin's legacy: 'Again and again I found in Lenin clear indications to the effect that national traditions, customs, and habits of all of the non-Russian peoples were to be carefully heeded, and the equality of rights of all people to be realised. ... With Stalin, in contrast, the formation of the USSR in December 1922 was the supposed proof that the national question in the USSR was solved for all time. To be sure, the notion of the possible secession of

88 See especially Lenin's speeches to the 1920 Second Congress of the Comintern, where the wide-ranging debate on colonialism and national liberation also included very interesting speeches by the Indian Marxist M.N. Roy and the Iranian delegate Avetis Sultanzade, reproduced in Riddell (ed.) 1991.

89 *cw* 36:605–10; emphasis added.

a union republic would be viewed as only "bourgeois nationalism" or complete "treason".⁹⁰ Lenin's concept of national liberation is one of his most important theoretical achievements, one that placed him far ahead of his time.

Not until the 1950s and the rise of a new Third World would the themes raised by Lenin on this subject be taken up again and developed further, this time by writers such as Frantz Fanon;⁹¹ this development makes these writings of Lenin especially relevant for today. I am not arguing that Lenin was fully aware of the Third World revolutions that were to emerge especially after World War II. Although he did not recognise Asian anti-colonial revolutions as a factor totally independent from the Western labour movement, and although he certainly devoted little specific attention to Africa, he anticipated nonetheless the new stage of the Third World, especially in Asia, far more than any other Marxist theorist of his time. Although he may have thought Germany to be more important than Asia as long as that country seethed with revolution, and apparently thought little about Africa or Latin America, he did, in the midst of World War I and the Irish Revolution, conceive of a new revolutionary subject: anti-colonial revolution. In sum, soon after his Hegel studies Lenin comes to treat national liberation as a decisive dialectical opposite of imperialism. In taking this position he stands alone among the Marxist theorists of his time.

Nonetheless, there are serious flaws in Lenin's concept of national liberation. First, he continued to reject the notion of cultural autonomy. In so limiting the choices for oppressed nationalities to secession or participation in a unitary state, Lenin closed off avenues that might have been explored and undercut the liberatory force of much of his argument. Second, he never fully applied the concept to areas under Soviet control, such as Ukraine, Central Asia, or the Caucasus. Third, and most important, his concept of a centralised vanguard party, which soon after 1917 became the basis for a one-party state, tended to vitiate the whole notion of self-determination. For example, after 1918 the Ukrainian Communist party was subordinated to the Russian party, and soon thereafter the same thing happened in Central Asia and, by 1921–22, in the Caucasus.

At an international level, the Comintern soon adopted similar centralist organisational principles, as in the famous twenty-one conditions for membership. If Ukrainian or Chinese Communists were under the discipline of the centralised, Russian-dominated Comintern, what then was the real content of point eight, which 'ordered' all parties to support movements for national liberation? What was the decentralising content of the right of self-determination

90 Leonhard 1991, p. 1000.

91 On the relationship of Fanon's thought to Marxism, see especially Gendzier 1973; Turner and Alan 1986.

when the world revolution was supposed to be led by a group of parties under Moscow's discipline based on those very specific twenty-one conditions? This last problem arose in large part because, although Lenin reorganised his thinking after 1914 in several important areas, his notion of the vanguard party was not among them. I return to this problem in the next chapter, where Lenin's concept of the party is shown to have seriously undermined the liberatory content of his notions of the state and revolution and of soviet power.

State and Revolution: Subjectivity, Grassroots Democracy, and the Critique of Bureaucracy

Most commentators agree that Lenin's 1917–18 writings on the state and revolution mark a break with his earlier theorising. The American sovietologist Adam Ulam calls the book *State and Revolution* 'a straight-forward profession of anarchism' and writes that 'no work could be more *un*-representative of its author's political philosophy'.¹ Ulam is also scandalised by the book's radicalism, its talk of 'smashing' the state. Another American sovietologist, Robert V. Daniels, who is more aware of various trends within Marxism than is Ulam, nonetheless considers *State and Revolution* to be a utopian work, one that he holds to be 'a monument to the author's intellectual deviation during the year of revolution, 1917'.² He writes further: '*State and Revolution*, the most developed product of Lenin's thought in 1917, stands in sharp contrast to the main substance of "Leninism" expressed previously and subsequently. This is suggested by the fact that in *State and Revolution* the "party" in the abstract, as an element in the theory of the revolutionary process, is mentioned exactly once, and then only obliquely'.³ These writers do not connect *State and Revolution* to the Hegel Notebooks, as have some Marxist commentators.

Dunayevskaya argues that an essentially Hegelian methodology underlies *State and Revolution*. Lenin, she writes: 'concluded that above all, a Marxist would have to answer: organisation of the proletariat *for what purpose?* His mind working dialectically, Lenin now approaches the problem from two levels: (1) the real and (2) the ideal springing from the real'.⁴ She sees this as a change, a reorganisation of Lenin's thought: 'Now the big break was to be with *his own past*'.⁵ She connects this to the major theses of *State and Revolution*: 'Basing himself on Marx's concept that "centralised state power, with its ubiquitous organs of standing army, police, bureaucracy, clergy and judicature – are organs wrought after the plan of a systematic and hierarchic division of labor", Lenin now saw that the need of his time was to *destroy bureaucratism ...*

1 Ulam 1965, p. 353.

2 Daniels 1953, p. 22.

3 Daniels 1953, p. 23.

4 Dunayevskaya 1988 [1958], p. 187.

5 Dunayevskaya 1988 [1958], p. 189.

That now became the key to his theory and his practice. It was a new organisation of thought in the true Hegelian-Marxian manner'.⁶ This reorganisation of thought meant a radical concept of working-class democracy based on the soviets, a form of direct working-class and peasant democracy that first emerged in the 1905 revolution and that reappeared on an even wider scale in 1917: 'Lenin put his theoretical emphasis on the concept of all, "to a man", to run their own lives. "*No police, no army, no officialdom. Every worker, every peasant, every toiler, every one* who is exploited, the whole population to a man". That was Lenin's vision and that is what he aimed at in practice. The masses, to Lenin, were not a "means" to reach an "end", socialism. Their self-activity is socialism.'⁷ A somewhat similar argument is made by the French Marxist sociologist Michael Löwy, who writes that Lenin's break with his past in 1917 centered on his abandonment of 'pre-dialectical Marxism', with its 'fixed and abstract principle that 'the Russian Revolution can only be a bourgeois one – Russia is not economically developed enough for a socialist revolution.' Löwy argues that Lenin made this break after having made a 'materialist reading of Hegel'.⁸

A.J. Polan, a British political theorist, takes a different tack, arguing that Lenin's 'utopian' politics in *State and Revolution*, which was rooted in the Russian radical intellectual's 'enthusiasm' for Hegel rather than Kant, is ultimately 'totalitarian'. According to Polan, who prefers Kant to Hegel and Max Weber to Marx, *State and Revolution* is not in contradiction with official Leninism or even Stalin's purges, because Lenin's advocacy of direct democracy through workers' councils and soviets lacks 'a theory of political institutions' with checks and balances and well-organised political parties. This results in 'an absence of politics' that Polan thinks leads to totalitarianism.⁹ Polan tends to assume liberal parliamentary democracy with a free-market economy as the only possible form of democracy in a technologically advanced society. He writes that there are dangerous totalitarian trends as well in the Frankfurt School's critique of bureaucracy, which is based on a reading of Weber 'polluted by Leninism'.¹⁰ It flows from Polan's argument that any leftist radical theory arguing for the transcendence of capitalism will also be 'totalitarian'. Presumably other forms

6 Dunayevskaya 1988 [1958], p. 191.

7 Dunayevskaya 1988 [1958], p. 192.

8 Michael Löwy, "De la Grande Logique de Hegel à la gare finlandaise de Petrograd," in Löwy 1973, pp. 142–3. See also the American radical historian Louis Menashe's provocative article 'Vladimir Ilyich Bakunin: An Essay on Lenin' (Menashe 1973) – an article that does not, however, mention the Hegel Notebooks.

9 Polan 1984, pp. 129–30. See also Gabardi 1987, 629–36.

10 Polan 1984, p. 99.

of totalitarianism would include Marx's writings on the Paris Commune, Luxemburg's concept of revolutionary democracy, Anton Pannekoek's notion of a socialist democracy based on workers' councils, or even the ideas proposed in France in May and June 1968. Such an external critique can give us only a limited view of the context or the problematic of Lenin's *State and Revolution*.¹¹

Colletti argues that a radical concept of democracy can be found in Lenin's 'critique of parliament, i.e., of *liberal* or *bourgeois* democracy'. Lenin's *State and Revolution*, he writes, 'is a critique of the *anti-democratic* nature of parliament – a critique made in the name of that infinitely "fuller" (and hence qualitatively different) democracy, the democracy of the soviets, the only democracy that deserves the name of socialist democracy'.¹² Critics such as Polan dismiss all types of democracy other than representative democracy under capitalism. In what follows I will take seriously Lenin's notion of a soviet republic instead of assuming, as do many of Lenin's liberal critics, that such a system is either impractical or inherently totalitarian.

Lenin unquestionably considered *State and Revolution* to be his most important theoretical achievement. For example, in 1918 he wanted it to be translated into Western European languages before any of his other theoretical works.¹³ A year earlier he was so determined to develop and present it as the ground for a revolution he saw coming on the horizon not only in Russia but also elsewhere in Europe that he made the following request of the Bolshevik leader L.B. Kamenev: '*Entre nous*: if they do me in, I ask you to publish my notebook: "Marxism on the State" (it got left behind in Stockholm) ... I think it could be published after a week's work. I believe it to be important, because not only Plekhanov, but also Kautsky have bungled things'.¹⁴ That was July 1917, and Lenin was on the run, facing prosecution for treason during the anti-Bolshevik hysteria gripping Russia at that time. The liberal provisional government was whipping up patriotic sentiment against the Bolsheviks because of their anti-war stance, even accusing Lenin of being a German agent. While hiding in a rural area of Finland across the border from Petrograd, Lenin had the manuscript sent from Stockholm and finished the work by September.

11 For a more serious treatment of the differences between Weber and Lenin, see Weber's discussion of representation in *Economy and Society* (Weber 1978), where he refers in a brief discussion to 'the Soviet type of republican organization' as 'a substitute for immediate democracy' in the sense of an attempt to come close to immediate democracy (p. 293). The American Marxist sociologist Erik Olin Wright, to whom Polan does not refer, provides a critical discussion of some of these issues in Wright 1974–5.

12 Colletti 1972, p. 224.

13 CW 44:160.

14 CW 36:454.

Like *Imperialism*, the book *State and Revolution* was not intended for only a Russian audience, and it is certainly not focused narrowly on the immediate political situation on the eve of the revolution. Rather, it is Lenin's summation of his concept of revolution. The timing of the work also shows Lenin's preoccupation with theoretical issues even in the midst of 1917. As Neil Harding notes, challenging the commonly held view of Lenin as party man first, last, and always:

Perhaps the most puzzling and inexplicable period of Lenin's life, from the standpoint of those ... who would have us believe that he was pre-eminently an instinctive practical politician, are his activities during the turbulent months following the downfall of the autocracy in February 1917 ... Instead of devoting his time to political wheeler-dealing to achieve immediate tactical advantage to his party in Russia, he concentrated his energies on an almost academic, exhaustive study of Marx and Engels on the question of the state with a view to outlining the longterm strategic objectives of the global socialist revolution.¹⁵

Referring to Bukharin's articles in 1916 on Marxism and the state, Harding also writes that we must acknowledge 'how important an influence Bukharin's ideas had upon Lenin in the critical first six months of 1917',¹⁶ the very period in which *State and Revolution* was written. Harding also mentions two major areas where Lenin went beyond Bukharin: 'The problems which Bukharin did not answer and the problems which Lenin took as central in *The State and Revolution* were, in the first place, was there guidance in the writings of Marx and Engels for deciding the point at which the state could and should be dispensed with and, secondly, was there any firm advice on the form of association with which to replace it?'¹⁷ As Lenin's ideas developed in 1917, the soviets of workers, soldiers, and peasants came theoretically to replace the state, giving his theory of the state an element of subjectivity missing in Bukharin's articles. In addition, Lenin's analysis of some of Marx's key writings on the state gives his book greater depth and generalizability.

In his article 'The Imperialist Robber State' (1916), Bukharin critiques the prevailing Marxist orthodoxy of the Second International: 'it is quite erroneous to seek the distinction between the socialists and anarchists in the fact that the

15 Harding 1981, p. 83. Harding's treatment of *State and Revolution* is probably the best chapter of his book.

16 Harding 1981, p. 94.

17 Harding 1981, p. 117.

former are supporters and the latter opponents of the state'.¹⁸ Bukharin also writes that the modern state grows in power, bringing all other institutions under a single authority:

*In this way there is formed a single all-embracing organisation, a modern imperialist robber state as an all-powerful organisation of the ruling bourgeoisie, with innumerable functions and gigantic power, both spiritual (various methods of fooling people: religion, the press, the school, etc.) and material (the police, army). This power penetrates into all pores of finance-capitalist society and puts its peculiar specific stamp upon our time. And we see here the dialectics of history: the state, which was at first the only organisation of the ruling class, is turned into an organisation that exists side by side with others in order to turn back into a single organisation which has absorbed into itself all others. Such is the modern monster, the modern leviathan of statehood.*¹⁹

Bukharin concludes that under the pressure of war, the workers will initially become patriotic, but that in the end, once its violence and destructiveness become clearer, they will rise up against the modern leviathan state.

Whereas Bukharin's writings stress objective factors such as the centralisation of the state, the future Council Communist Pannekoek's writings, which Lenin also studied in this period, give greater stress to subjective factors, such as working-class consciousness and self-activity. In his 1912 dispute with Kautsky over revolutionary tactics, Pannekoek attacks the latter for referring to unorganised (non-unionised) workers as 'motley masses'. Pannekoek argues that what is most important is not formal membership in a union or a party but rather 'the spirit of organisation',²⁰ the sense of being bound together in the quest for a 'new humanity'.²¹ He writes further that 'irrespective of all assaults upon the external forms of association, the masses in which this spirit dwells will always regroup themselves in new organisations'.²² Pannekoek also attacks Kautsky for wanting socialists merely to take over the state: 'The struggle of the

18 Bukharin, "The Imperialist Robber State," in Lenin 1972, p. 103. In this volume Bukharin's article is published along with Lenin's marginalia. Next to this passage Lenin writes 'correct'. This important work is not included in Lenin's 45-volume English-language *Collected Works*. Most of it was first published in Russian in 1930.

19 'The Imperialist Robber State,' in Lenin 1972, p. 106.

20 'Marxist Theory and Revolutionary Tactics', in Smart (ed.) 1978, p. 57. Further page references are made directly in the text.

21 'Marxist Theory and Revolutionary Tactics', in Smart (ed.) 1978, p. 59.

22 'Marxist Theory and Revolutionary Tactics', in Smart (ed.) 1978, p. 57.

proletariat is not simply a struggle with the bourgeoisie over the state power as object, but a struggle against state power ... the content of this revolution is the destruction of the instruments of power of the state and their dislodgement [*Auflösung*] with the aid of the instruments of power of the proletariat ... The struggle ceases only when, as the end result of it, the state organisation is completely destroyed'.²³ Lenin identifies strongly with these passages from Pannekoek.

Lenin was influenced by both Bukharin and Pannekoek. There are, however, important differences between their work and his. First, neither Bukharin nor Pannekoek had any interest in Hegelian dialectics, both tending toward a 'scientific materialist' position.²⁴ Second, whereas Bukharin and Pannekoek focussed on the need to concretise Marxist theory in the light of new developments, Lenin also wanted to rethink Marxist theory in a more fundamental way, by going back to key theoretical texts to look at how established Marxism had failed the test of 1914. Earlier, as we saw, this had taken him to a direct study of Hegel. At this point he made a formal exegesis of Marx's *Critique of the Gotha Program* and *Civil War in France*, texts that had been consigned to near-oblivion even by the leftist radicals of the Second International. Dunayevskaya writes: 'As he had "lived" with the *Science of Logic* in the writing of *Imperialism*, so now he re-created Marx's *Civil War in France* ... as *State and Revolution*'.²⁵

Third, whereas Bukharin wrote of the leviathan state, Lenin (although not in the book *State and Revolution* itself) in 1917–18 wrote more on the Russian soviets, the subjective element that was to challenge and replace the bourgeois state. Although he does not refer to the Hegel Notebooks, Harding points to the dialectical character of Lenin's analysis of imperialism and the state: 'Lenin's projections were, in a way, intensely theoretical or dialectical. Throughout his writings in the period 1916–17 one encounters the central theme that capitalism in its imperialist phase not only carried the parasitism of the state machine to its highest possible extent, it also simultaneously created the conditions for the transcendence of the state as such. It was, for Lenin, a dialectical act of faith that, locked within imperialism, existing in inverted form admittedly, were the very structures through which capitalism and the state were to be transcen-

23 Cited in Lenin 1972, pp. 74–5.

24 Bukharin's hostility toward Hegelian dialectics was discussed in Chapter 4. Regarding Pannekoek's philosophical position, in the article 'Anton Pannekoek and the Quest for an Emancipatory Socialism', Pannekoek's intellectual biographer John Gerber writes of 'serious flaws' in Pannekoek's position, including 'its confining philosophical materialism, reductionist methodology' and his 'almost Comtean faith in science and a rigid linear conception of historical progress' (Gerber 1988, p. 128).

25 Dunayevskaya 1988 [1958], p. 191.

ded'.²⁶ Harding also writes of Lenin's 'promethean conception' of the human being as the subject of history and connects this to the 'vision' that 'Marx had espoused in the 1844 Manuscripts'.²⁷ Although Lenin had read Hegel, however, he never read Marx's *1844 Manuscripts*. It is therefore more likely that the link to the young Marx is an indirect one: Lenin's stress on soviets, on democracy from below, and on mass action in his 1917–18 writings is a key link to his Hegel Notebooks, where he had given great stress to subjectivity as well as objectivity, something highly unusual for the Marxism of his time, but something that was more evident in the writings of the young Marx.

Although Lenin emphasises subjectivity in his 1917–18 writings, he also de-emphasises the type of economic analysis that was typical of the Second International. Robert Service observes this with regard to the 1917 'April Theses', but the comment could also apply to Lenin's whole corpus of writings that year: 'Most surprisingly, Lenin made no mention of the organisation of industry under the proposed socialist regime ... Nothing about central planning, except for a very general plea for soviet control "over social production and exchange of products". ... He focused on politics and on the soviets as the center of political life'.²⁸

Although Lenin never makes an explicit reference to Hegel in his 1917–18 writings on the state and revolution, he does occasionally mention dialectics. Let us now turn to that book, *State and Revolution*, subtitled *The Marxist Theory of the State and the Tasks of the Proletariat in the Revolution*.

1 *State and Revolution*

The bulk of *State and Revolution* is concerned with close textual analysis of two of Marx's works, *The Civil War in France* and *Critique of the Gotha Program*, both written after the Paris Commune of 1871. In *The Civil War in France* Marx sets out his view of the achievements of the Paris Commune and in so doing presents a vision of socialism as a form of direct self-rule by working people. Not only does the domination of capital need to be thrown off, Marx writes, but the bourgeois state also needs to be destroyed: 'the working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made state machinery, and wield it for its own purposes'.²⁹ He includes a fairly detailed critique of the modern state, 'with its ubiquitous

²⁶ Harding 1981, pp. 126–7.

²⁷ Harding 1981, p. 123.

²⁸ Service 1991, p. 159.

²⁹ Marx 1986 [1871], p. 328.

organs of standing army, police, bureaucracy, clergy, and judicature'.³⁰ The goal of the commune was 'to supersede ... class rule itself'³¹ and to create a classless society. Marx points to 'the suppression of the standing army, and the substitution for it of the armed people'.³² He writes that the commune's concept of radical democracy also included (1) direct and immediate recall of representatives by their constituents, (2) the notion that all 'public services had to be done at workmen's wages',³³ and (3) in some cases, the takeover and management of the factories by the workers. Marx concluded that the commune was 'the political form at last discovered under which to work out the economic emancipation of labor'.³⁴

In *Critique of the Gotha Program* (1875) Marx develops a concept of revolutionary organisation and of what he views as the socialist future. He does so in the course of a sharp critique of a compromise programme worked out in Germany by his own followers and those of his chief German rival, the statist socialist leader Ferdinand Lassalle. Whereas the Gotha Programme called for 'fair distribution of the proceeds of labour',³⁵ Marx writes of two phases beyond capitalism. In the first phase, the 'revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat',³⁶ everyone is required to work, and workers are paid according to the use value of their labor time. In the second phase, society becomes a free association of producers sharing the proceeds of everyone's labor, and the division between mental and manual labor has been overcome: 'In a higher phase of communist society, after the enslaving subordination of the individual to the division of labor, and thereby also the antithesis between mental and physical labor, has vanished; after labor has become not only a means of life but life's prime want; after the productive forces have also increased with the all-round development of the individual, and all the springs of common wealth flow more abundantly – only then can the narrow horizon of bourgeois right be crossed in its entirety and society inscribe on its banners: From each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs'.³⁷ This is one of Marx's best-known descriptions of socialism.

Marx also hits out sharply at the Gotha Programme's Lassalleian formulation that in relation to the working class, 'all other classes are only one reaction-

30 Marx 1986 [1871], p. 328.

31 Marx 1986 [1871], p. 331.

32 Ibid.

33 Ibid.

34 Marx 1986 [1871], p. 334.

35 Marx 1989 [1875], p. 87.

36 Marx 1989 [1875], p. 95.

37 Marx 1989 [1875], p. 87.

ary mass'.³⁸ He refers in particular to the peasantry and accuses Lassalle of alliances with the landowning classes. Marx critiques as well the programme's notion that the workers' movement would strive for self-emancipation 'within the framework of the present-day national state',³⁹ claiming that this is a move away from internationalism. In a passage that was very important to Lenin, Marx reacts particularly forcefully to the programme's goal of a 'free state':⁴⁰ 'It is by no means the aim of the workers ... to set the state free'.⁴¹

The Civil War in France and *Critique of the Gotha Programme* include some of Marx's most important descriptions of socialism, but these texts were not given much emphasis by the Second International, in large part because they would have questioned what had by the turn of the century become the orthodox notion of socialism, which, in the writings of theorists such as Kautsky and Hilferding, emphasised the taking over of the capitalist state to improve the lot of the workers through central economic planning.

Throughout his discussion in *State and Revolution* of these and other texts, Lenin focuses on a single problem: Marx's view in *The Civil War in France* that the old capitalist state must be 'smashed' and not 'taken over' by the socialist revolution. Lenin paraphrases Marx: 'all previous revolutions perfected the state machine, whereas it must be broken, smashed'.⁴² Nor is Lenin forgetting his earlier studies of Hegel, for he calls Marx's view the product not only of 'a rich knowledge of history' but also of 'a profound *philosophical* conception of the world'.⁴³ The age of imperialism, with its monopoly capitalism and even greater centralised planning, had created what Lenin termed 'the process of transformation of monopoly capitalism into state-monopoly capitalism',⁴⁴ which meant a strengthened state machine ruling over the workers: 'Imperialism – the era of bank capital, the era of gigantic capitalist monopolies, of the development of monopoly capitalism into state-monopoly capitalism – has clearly shown an extraordinary strengthening of the "state machine" and an unprecedented growth in its bureaucratic and military apparatus in connection with the intensification of repressive measures against the proletariat both in the monarchical and in the freest, republican countries'.⁴⁵ Lenin did not advocate taking over such a state machine.

38 Marx 1989 [1875], p. 88.

39 Marx 1989 [1875], p. 89.

40 Marx 1989 [1875], p. 94.

41 Marx 1989 [1875], p. 94.

42 CW 25:411.

43 CW 25:412; emphasis added.

44 CW 25:387.

45 CW 25:415.

He was talking about a political system based on direct mass self-rule by peasants and workers, which was itself a transition to the complete 'withering away of the state': 'All officials, without exception, elected and subject to recall *at any time*, their salaries reduced to the level of ordinary "workmen's wages", these simple and "self-evident" democratic measures, while completely uniting the interests of the workers and the majority of the peasants, at the same time serve as a bridge leading from capitalism to socialism'.⁴⁶ Basing himself on Marx's *Civil War in France*, Lenin here is talking about the abolition of parliamentarianism in favour of rule by the new institutions spontaneously created by the Russian peasants and workers in 1905 and 1917: the soviets.

Lenin begins now to debate not tactics but goals, and he has in mind not goals in the ordinary empiricist meaning of that word but rather a vision of what a classless society might look like, based on experiences of actual mass revolutions. Beginning in 1914, by studying Hegel and then discussing first imperialism and national liberation and then the state and revolution, Lenin gradually arrives at new views of fundamental questions. Rather than focusing on reform versus revolution or which groups, such as the peasantry, are in fact revolutionary, Lenin now centres the debate on a new concept of mass self-activity, on a new vision of what both revolution and a new society look like. As Colletti writes: 'Lenin's polemic is not directed against those who do not wish for the seizure of power. The object of his attack is not *reformism*. On the contrary, it is directed against those who wish for the seizure of power but not for the destruction of the old State as well. The author he aims at is Kautsky. But not, let it be clear, the Kautsky who was to emerge after 1917 ... but rather the Kautsky of the writings devoted to the struggle against opportunism: the Kautsky who *wants* revolution, and yet *does not want* the destruction of the old state machine'.⁴⁷ The key here is far more than Lenin's opposition to Kautsky's reformism beginning in 1914. Lenin is also rethinking his support of Kautsky's earlier writings, some of which, like *The Road to Power* (1909), were quite leftist and yet did not speak of the actual destruction of the state.

A year later a very similar concept of direct, or council, democracy was posed in Germany by Luxemburg, who made it clear that she based her concept on the experience of the Russian Revolution. In her speech in the last days of 1918 to the founding convention of the new German Communist party, she attacked 'that which has so long been the official Marxism of the social democracy' and pointed to the emergent 'workers and soldiers councils' in Germany

46 *cw* 25:426.

47 Colletti 1972, p. 219.

for which 'the Russian Revolution created the first watchwords for the world revolution'.⁴⁸ Such references to council versus parliamentary democracy cannot be found in her earlier writings; they were seemingly influenced by some of Lenin's formulations in 1917–18. None of this, however, stopped Luxemburg from also criticising the Bolsheviks sharply on the question of democracy, as will be shown a bit later.

In *State and Revolution* Lenin proposes the following type of revolutionary government in transition to a nonstate:

The workers, after winning political power, will smash the old bureaucratic apparatus, shatter it to its very foundations and raze it to the ground; they will replace it by a new one, consisting of the very same workers and other employees, *against* whose transformation into bureaucrats the measures will at once be taken which were specified in detail by Marx and Engels: (1) not only election, but also recall at any time, (2) pay not to exceed that of a workman; (3) immediate introduction of control and supervision by *all*, so that *all* may become 'bureaucrats' for a time, and that, therefore, *nobody* may be able to become a 'bureaucrat'.⁴⁹

He also acknowledges that when in 'opposing Kautsky, Pannekoek came out as one of the "Left Radical" trend which also included Luxemburg, Radek and others', the latter group 'represented Marxism' in their sharp debates with Kautsky and Bebel around 1910–12.⁵⁰ This is again an implicit self-critique, since he had not taken sides in this major dispute.

He explicitly takes issue with Kautsky's opposition to so-called primitive democracy:

Under socialism much of 'primitive' democracy will inevitably be revived, since, for the first time in the history of civilised society, the *mass* of the population will rise to taking an *independent* part, not only in voting and elections, *but also in the everyday administration of the state*. Under socialism *all* will govern in turn and will soon become accustomed to no one governing.... Let us learn revolutionary boldness from the Communards; let us see in their practical measures the *outline* of really urgent and immediately possible measures, and then, *following this road*, we shall achieve the complete destruction of bureaucracy. The possibility of

48 Luxemburg 1970, pp. 411, 414.

49 CW 25:486.

50 CW 25:488–9.

this destruction is guaranteed by the fact that socialism will shorten the working day, will raise *the people* to a new life, will create such conditions for the *majority* of the population as will enable *everybody*, without exception, to perform 'state functions', and this will lead to the *complete withering away* of every form of state in general.⁵¹

Many of these conceptions were also elaborated beforehand in the one hundred pages of material constituting Lenin's notebooks that were published under the title *Marxism on the State*. Written in January and February 1917, these notebooks that form *Marxism on the State* are far briefer than those on imperialism and the national question or those on Hegel. They are also much closer to the final text of *State and Revolution* than are the *Notebooks on Imperialism* to the book *Imperialism*. There are, however, some key formulations that were not included in the published *State and Revolution*. Among these are Lenin's discussions of changes in the European labour movement after 1871, which seem to show once again the use of his Hegel-derived concept of 'transformation into opposite', although he does not use the term explicitly here. In this case he is describing the transformation of capitalism into state-monopoly capitalism and imperialism and of the labour and socialist movements into a 'bureaucracy'. He writes:

Changes after 1871? They are all such, or their general nature or their sum is such, that bureaucracy has *everywhere* soared (both in parliamentarianism, within it, – in local self-government, in the joint-stock companies, in the trust and so on). That is the first thing. And second: the workers' 'socialist' parties have, by $\frac{3}{4}$, 'grown into' a *similar* bureaucracy. The split between the social patriots and the internationalists, between the reformists and the revolutionaries has, consequently, a still more profound significance: the reformists and the social-patriots '*perfect*' the bureaucratic state machine ... while the revolutionaries must '*smash*' it, this 'bureaucratic-military state machine', smash it, replacing it by the 'Commune', a new 'semi-state'.⁵²

This passage, which shows more fully the connection between Lenin's study of imperialism and his work on the state, was not developed for inclusion in *State and Revolution*.

51 CW 25:494.

52 Lenin 1972, pp. 50–1.

Most important to his future theoretical work on the state and revolution was Lenin's brief reference in his notebooks to the soviets: 'One could perhaps express the whole thing in a drastically abbreviated fashion as follows: the *replacement* of the old ("ready made") state machine *and of parliaments by Soviets of Workers' Deputies and their mandated delegates*. This is the essence of it!'⁵³ This is apparently the first reference in Lenin's post-1914 writings to the need to reestablish the soviets, originally created by the workers during the 1905 revolution. Smashed by the government after 1905 and largely ignored even by Marxist theorists afterward, they were to reemerge in the 1917 revolution. The British Marxist Marian Sawyer concludes that 'this theoretical leap by Lenin in January–February 1917 was *in no way* connected with the re-emergence of the soviet movement in Russia' since Lenin's statement anticipated the outbreak of revolution in 1917 by some weeks.⁵⁴ Although the kernel of Lenin's 1917 concept of soviet power may be already indicated here in his notebooks, such a brief and somewhat tentative reference in notebooks of over one hundred pages does not yet show us how central the soviets were to become in Lenin's thinking a few weeks later, once they reemerged.⁵⁵ Nevertheless, Sawyer is correct when she points to the essentially *theoretical* nature of Lenin's writings on the soviets in 1917. It was far more than sloganeering or even a political programme: his analysis of the soviets was at the core of a body of theoretical writings which was intended for a *world* Marxist audience, not only a Russian one.

Finally, Lenin clarifies some of his differences with Bukharin on Marxism and the state in these notes. Lenin's marginal notes on Bukharin's article include many question marks and phrases like 'wrong, incomplete'. Whereas Bukharin tends to see undifferentiated totalities – the leviathan state, the proletariat crushed, imperialism dominant – Lenin's dialectic focuses on the *contradictions* in each sphere. Thus the new state for Lenin engenders a new type of revolt: the working class becomes differentiated into a labour bureaucracy and an aristocracy of labour on the one side and the rank-and-file workers on the other, and modern imperialism calls forth new forms of national revolution, from Ireland to India. Whereas Bukharin becomes most specific on the new

53 Lenin 1972, p. 51. Here I have substituted Marian Sawyer's clearer translation of Lenin's reference to the soviets, even though I also give a page reference to the Moscow translation of *Marxism on the State*. See Sawyer's important article, 'The Genesis of *State and Revolution*' (Sawyer 1977), p. 218.

54 Sawyer 1977, p. 219.

55 For example, as late as January 1917, Lenin's 'Lecture on the 1905 Revolution' (CW 23:236–53), which occupies eighteen pages in his *Collected Works*, devotes less than a half a page to the soviets. This lack of emphasis on them was to change radically in his writings after their reemergence in 1917.

structures of power and domination, Lenin becomes most specific on the new forms of revolt and new forms of organisation that revolutionary upheavals had developed in 1871 and 1905 and were developing in 1917.

Lenin's new vision is soon developed further. It is sketched out in several important pamphlets, as well as innumerable speeches and articles from the day Lenin returned to Russia in April 1917. I now turn to a discussion of some of the most important of these. They are in a sense the unfinished part of *State and Revolution*, whose manuscript breaks off just as Lenin is about to discuss 1905 and 1917. Lenin's concluding postscript of 30 November 1917, reads: 'It is more pleasant and useful to go through the 'experience of the revolution' than to write about it'.⁵⁶

2 The New Vision of Revolution: Letters, Speeches, and Pamphlets, 1917–18

Although the theoretical ground for Lenin's 1917–18 writings in terms of their relationship to Marx and Engels and their critique of established Marxism is contained in *State and Revolution*, the vision of a new society with totally new human relations touched on in the book is greatly expanded in these major speeches and pamphlets. Taken together with *State and Revolution*, they give us many indications of what Lenin would no doubt have written had he been able to finish the book with chapters on the 1905 and March 1917 revolutions.

After the outbreak of revolution on 8 March 1917,⁵⁷ Lenin's most immediate statement on revolution is found in 'Letters from Afar'. Totalling forty-five pages and some never published during his lifetime, the letters were written between the March revolution and his departure for Russia a few weeks later. By the third letter Lenin begins forcefully to express the type of ideas found in *State and Revolution*. That these ideas constituted a change in Lenin's thinking is shown by the Petrograd Bolsheviks' decision not to publish this letter in *Pravda*. They in fact were taking a position opposite to Lenin's, seeking

⁵⁶ *CW* 25:497.

⁵⁷ I am using here the Western-style calendar adopted in 1918, after the November Bolshevik Revolution, instead of the more commonly used old-style calendar, under which the first revolution was in February 1917, and the second in October. I do so to accentuate an important relationship between the 1917 revolution and the Western socialist and feminist movements: the revolution began with demonstrations in Petrograd by working women on 8 March 1917, part of worldwide celebrations of International Women's Day. For an account, see Rowbotham 1973.

posts for Bolsheviks in the provisional government. The crucial passage from the third letter reads:

Organisation is the slogan of the moment. But to confine oneself to that is to say nothing, for, on the one hand, organisation is *always* needed; hence, mere reference to the necessity of 'organising the masses' explains absolutely nothing. On the other hand, he who confines himself solely to this becomes an abettor of the liberals, for the *very thing* the liberals want in order to strengthen their rule is that the workers *should not go beyond their ordinary* 'legal' ... organisations, i.e., that they should *only* join their party, their trade union, their cooperative society, etc.

Guided by their class instinct, the workers have realised that in revolutionary times they need *not only* ordinary, but an entirely different organisation. They have rightly taken the path indicated by the experience of our 1905 Revolution and of the 1871 Paris Commune; they have set up a *Soviet of Workers' Deputies*: they have begun to develop, expand and strengthen it by drawing in *soldiers'* deputies and, undoubtedly, deputies from rural *wage-workers* and then (in one form or another) from the entire peasant poor ...

It might be asked: What should be the function of the Soviets of Workers' Deputies? They 'must be regarded as organs of insurrection, of revolutionary rule', we wrote in No. 47 of the Geneva *Sotsial-Demokrat*, of 13 October 1915 ...

The proletariat ... must '*smash!*' to use Marx's expression, this 'ready-made' state machine and substitute a new one for it by *merging* the police force, the army and the bureaucracy with *the entire armed people* ... the proletariat must organise and arm *all* the poor, exploited sections of the population in order that they *themselves* should take the organs of state power directly into their own hands, in order that *they themselves* should constitute these organs of state power.⁵⁸

This letter, unpublished during Lenin's lifetime, is his earliest statement of his new vision of socialism, made at the very time that he was writing *State and Revolution*. Despite the reference to the 1915 article calling soviets 'organs of insurrection, of revolutionary rule', there is a big difference between a passing reference in 1915 and Lenin's vision in 1917 of the soviets as the key to the Russian Revolution. It is also notable that in its first paragraph, the letter critiques

58 CW 23:323-6.

sharply a notion usually identified with Leninism: building the party as the key to a successful socialist revolution. His fellow Bolshevik leaders in Petrograd, to whom it was addressed, understood the novelty of this letter very well, which is why they did not choose to publish it.

Lenin had apparently continued his study of Marx on the Paris Commune for *State and Revolution* after the March 1917 revolution and the reemergence of the soviets. Krupskaya writes in her memoirs of Lenin's activities in the week after the outbreak of revolution: 'On March 18, the anniversary of the Paris Commune, Ilyich went to Chaux-de-Fonds, a large Swiss labour center. He went there gladly. ... The thought of the Paris Commune, of utilising its experience in the newly launched Russian revolutionary movement, and of avoiding its errors, occupied Ilyich's mind a good deal those days'.⁵⁹ Many scholars, including even Hegelian Marxists like Lukács, stress Lenin's 'practical' side; that Lenin broke off the manuscript of *State and Revolution* on the eve of the Bolshevik Revolution, they claim, shows that 'in the reciprocal relation of theory and practice Lenin always opted for the priority of practice'.⁶⁰ Krupskaya, however, seems to be showing us something quite different: a person who in 1914 studies Hegel during the greatest political crisis of his life and who now, on the eve of his greatest political activity, plunges into a study not just of current events, or even of the last Russian revolution, but rather of Marx on the state, bureaucracy, and revolutionary democracy.

Thus the uniqueness of Lenin may lie less in his preference for the practical side of things and more in the surprising extent to which – unlike most of the other leaders of 1917 – he managed to continue his *serious theoretical work* in the midst of the revolution. For it seems clear that *State and Revolution* was hardly conceived, let alone fully worked out, by the time of that January 1917 lecture on 1905 – and yet it was completed by September of 1917. What other Russian political leader produced a theoretical work, not to speak of such a serious one, in those turbulent days, March through September 1917? As Harding argues: 'Lenin had elaborated a far more consistent theoretical justification for his new political strategies than the Mensheviks had for their old ones ... he had elaborated a new Marxist analysis which justified an advance towards socialism. ... None of the prominent theorists of Menshevism even attempted to keep pace with, or offer substantial criticism of, the theoretical premisses which Bukharin and Lenin elaborated in the period 1914 to 1917–18'.⁶¹ Had Harding been able to add the little phrase, "Hegelian dialectics" to "strategy", he

59 Krupskaya 1960, p. 337.

60 Lukács, 1967 postscript to Lukács 1971b [1924], p. 100.

61 Harding 1981, p. 100.

would also have been able to separate those arguably quite *different* two theorists, Lenin and Bukharin, in addition to pointing to the difference that he argued existed between Lenin and the Mensheviks.

For Lenin, the next step after 'Letters from Afar' are the famous 'April Theses', presented immediately on his return from exile. So controversial were the theses that they met with virtually no support even from other Bolshevik leaders when he first presented them. Only Alexandra Kollontai spoke in Lenin's support that day. In these theses Lenin refers to his theoretical work around Marx on the Paris Commune, as exemplified by point five: 'Not a parliamentary republic – to return to a parliamentary republic from the Soviets of Workers' Deputies would be a retrograde step – but a republic of Soviets of Workers', Agricultural Laborers' and Peasants' Deputies throughout the country, from top to bottom. Abolition of the police, the army and the bureaucracy. The salaries of all officials, all of whom are elective and displaceable at any time, not to exceed the average wage of a competent worker'.⁶² Lenin articulates here a programme very similar to that found in Marx's writings on the Paris Commune, which meant splits and controversies not only with Mensheviks but also with 'old Bolsheviks'.

Lenin himself underlines the break with his own Bolshevik past in an article published soon after he read the 'April Theses': 'we hear a clamour or protest from people who readily call themselves "old Bolsheviks". ... My answer is: The Bolshevik slogans and ideas *on the whole* have been confirmed by history; but *concretely* things have worked out *differently*; they are more original, more peculiar, more variegated than anyone could have expected'.⁶³ In this discussion of the 'variegated' nature of the revolution, Lenin may also be drawing once again on the discussion of universal and particular in his Hegel Notebooks, but of perhaps greater interest here is the theoretical elaboration of Lenin's new concepts that had been developed first in the as yet unpublished *State and Revolution*.

In the fifty-page pamphlet *Can the Bolsheviks Retain State Power?*, published on 1 November 1917, Lenin sketched out some of that book's central ideas:

But Marx, basing himself on the experience of the Paris Commune, taught that the proletariat *cannot* simply lay hold of the ready-made state machine and substitute a new one for it. (I deal with this in greater detail in a pamphlet, the first part of which is now finished and will soon appear

62 CW 24:23.

63 CW 24:44.

under the title *The State and Revolution. A Marxist Theory of the State and the Tasks of the Proletariat in the Revolution.*) This new type of state machinery was created by the Paris Commune, and the Russian Soviets of Workers', Soldiers' and Peasants' Deputies are a 'state apparatus' of the *same type*. ... The proletariat *cannot* 'lay hold of' the 'state apparatus' and 'set it in motion'. But it can *smash* everything that is oppressive, routine, incorrigibly bourgeois in the old state apparatus and substitute its *own*, new apparatus. The Soviets of Workers', Soldiers' and Peasants' Deputies are exactly that apparatus.⁶⁴

This 1 November pamphlet, however, is not limited to repeating theoretical schemata from *State and Revolution*. It also involves some very concrete description of the shape of a new society, self-administered by the workers, peasants, and revolutionary intellectuals. Again and again Lenin hammers away at this point in different ways, here giving examples of what a 'commune'-type administration would look like:

Only then shall we see what untapped forces of resistance to the capitalists are latent among the people; only then will what Engels called 'latent socialism' manifest itself. Only then, for every *ten thousand* overt and concealed enemies of working-class rule, manifesting themselves actively or by passive resistance, there will arise *a million* new fighters who had been politically dormant, writhing in the torments of poverty and despair, having ceased to believe that they were human, that they had the right to live, that they too could be served by the entire might of the modern centralised state, that contingents of the proletarian militia could, with the fullest confidence, also call upon them to take a direct, immediate, daily part in state administration.⁶⁵

Lenin concludes on this note, drawn fairly obviously from the young Marx: 'Ideas become a power when they grip the people'.⁶⁶ That is not rhetoric but an actual description of the way in which Lenin's vision of direct rule by the masses linked up with the ongoing spontaneous upheavals of Russian workers and peasants in 1917–18.

64 CW 26:102.

65 CW 26:126.

66 CW 26:130. In 1843 Marx wrote in the introduction to 'Contribution to a Critique of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*' that 'theory also becomes a material force as soon as it has gripped the masses' (Marx and Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 3, p. 182). This essay was known to Lenin's generation of Marxists.

This type of statement and concept hardly stopped with the November Revolution. A few days after the Bolshevik Revolution Lenin stated in a speech: 'Creative activity at the grass roots is the basic factor of the new public life. Let the workers set up workers' control at their factories. Let them supply the villages with manufactures in exchange for grain. Account must be taken of every single article, every pound of grain, because what socialism implies above all is keeping account of everything. Socialism cannot be decreed from above. Its spirit rejects the mechanical bureaucratic approach; living, creative socialism is the product of the masses themselves'.⁶⁷ This concept continued to guide Lenin's political thought well into 1918.

One of the most striking portraits of the new society Lenin envisioned in 1917–18 is contained in the December 1917 article 'How to Organise Emulation?'⁶⁸ Lenin writes: 'Emulation must be arranged between practical organisers from among the workers and peasants. Every attempt to establish stereotyped forms and to impose uniformity from above, as intellectuals are so inclined to do, must be combatted. Stereotyped forms and uniformity imposed from above have nothing in common with democratic and socialist centralism ... The Paris Commune gave a great example of how to combine initiative, independence, freedom of action and vigour from below with voluntary centralism free from stereotyped forms. Our Soviets are following the same road'.⁶⁹ Lenin calls for emulation also between peasants and workers on the one hand and revolutionary intellectuals on the other. He notes, however, that 'the workers and peasants are still "timid"; they must get rid of this timidity, and they certainly will get rid of it'.⁷⁰ Here Lenin points to a real problem that remains when elements from the deepest layers of the masses are brought into governing bodies: their shyness, their centuries-old deference to people with more formal education and social rank. This problem is rarely addressed by social and political theories of democracy, but it is an extremely important one.

Lenin's major analysis *The Immediate Tasks of the Soviet Government*, published in April 1918, almost six months after the Bolshevik Revolution, still shows a broad continuity with the previously discussed themes based on *State and Revolution*. Although by now he *does* call for 'a compromise, a departure from the principles of the Paris Commune', to allow the use of highly paid

67 CW 26:288–9.

68 The Moscow edition of Lenin's *Collected Works* translates the Russian word *sorevnovanie* as 'competition', but I have here used 'emulation', a more accurate translation provided to me by Albert Resis.

69 CW 26:413.

70 CW 26:412.

'bourgeois specialists' in helping to run the economy,⁷¹ and also calls for more 'discipline', the central thrust of his article is to continue and deepen grassroots soviet democracy: 'Our aim is to draw the whole of the poor into the practical work of administration, and all steps that are taken in this direction – the more varied they are, the better – should be carefully recorded, studied, systematised, tested by wider experience and embodied in law ... Even in the most democratic capitalist republics in the world, the poor never regard the bourgeois parliament as "their" institution. But the Soviets are "theirs" and not alien institutions to the mass of workers and peasants'.⁷² He also stresses 'forms and methods of control from below in order to counteract every shadow of a possibility of distorting the principles of soviet government, in order repeatedly and tirelessly to weed out bureaucracy'.⁷³ In sum, by 1917–18 Lenin has seemingly come a long way indeed from his 1902 *What Is to Be Done?* Paraphrasing and extending Kautsky, in that work he argued that the working class on its own could reach the level only of trade union consciousness.

3 An Ambivalent Critique of Bureaucracy, 1919–23

In contrast to the period 1917–19, when a radical socialist transformation seemed on the horizon not only in Russia but also in several other countries, such as Germany and Italy, by the 1920s the revolutionary wave had faded. During the long years of civil war, Lenin dropped most of the discussion of direct rule by the masses in favor of centralising and authoritarian policies that were dubbed 'War Communism'. By April 1920 he saw it this way: '*Dictatorial powers and one man management are not contradictory to socialist democracy*'.⁷⁴ As Robert Daniels writes: 'Most party members ceased to take the program of *State and Revolution* seriously, at least not in their day-to-day activity. This neglect became general under the pressure of the civil war. The soviets, supposedly embodying the control measures of the 1917 program, fell into abeyance, as the locus of real political power shifted to the party and especially to the higher organs of the party'.⁷⁵ In the years 1922–3, however, as is well known, Lenin began to make frequent critiques of bureaucracy once again.

71 CW 27:249.

72 CW 27:273–4.

73 CW 27:275.

74 CW 30:503; emphasis added.

75 Daniels 1953, p. 35. A more cynical view is presented by Kolakowski 1978: 'According to *The State and Revolution* only an ignoramus or a crafty bourgeois could suggest that the

His famous 'Will' of late 1922 calls both Stalin and Trotsky bureaucratic and urges the former's removal as general secretary of the party: 'Comrade Stalin, having become General Secretary, has concentrated an enormous power in his hands; and I am not sure that he always knows how to use that power with sufficient caution. On the other hand, Comrade Trotsky, as was proved by his struggle against the Central Committee in connection with the question of the Peoples' Commissariat for Communications, is distinguished not only by his exceptional abilities – personally he is, to be sure, the most able man in the present Central Committee – but also by his too far-reaching self-confidence and a disposition to be too much attracted by the purely administrative side of affairs'. In a postscript he sharpens further the critique of Stalin: *Postscript*: Stalin is too rude and this fault, entirely supportable in relations among us Communists, becomes insupportable in the office of General Secretary. Therefore I propose to the comrades to find a way of removing Stalin from that position and appoint to it another man who in all respects differs from Stalin only in superiority – namely more patient, more loyal, more polite and more attentive to comrades, less capricious, etc'.⁷⁶ Missing in this and other late writings by Lenin on bureaucracy, however, is a well-developed concept of a dialectical opposite to the problem he was analysing.

Lenin's theory of imperialism, as we have seen, not only sketches the rise of new forms of capital but also points to a new revolutionary subject arising within and alongside the transformation of capitalism into imperialism and monopoly: national liberation movements of oppressed nations and the heightened revolutionary consciousness of 'lower and deeper' layers of the proletariat inside the imperialist country itself. Furthermore, his theory of the state and revolution critiques modern centralised bureaucratic capitalism and discusses its direct opposite, the yearning for direct rule by the working people, whether in the form of the Paris Commune or of the Russian soviets. Here in the 'Will', however, this type of dialectic seems to be at a standstill. We have reached a real barrier in Lenin's thought.

An examination of his stances in the 1920s shows that he never abandoned his commitment to the vanguard party as first elaborated in *What Is to Be Done?* It seems to have coexisted uneasily alongside his 1917–18 writings on grassroots

workers are incapable of directly and collectively managing industry, the state and the administration. Two years later, it turned out that only an ignoramus or a crafty bourgeois could suggest that the workers were capable of directly and collectively managing industry, the state and the administration' (p. 505).

76 cw 36:594–6. Although I cite the Moscow edition of Lenin's *Collected Works*, I am once again using the translation published by Trotsky in Lenin 1970, pp. 5–7.

democracy, and it reemerged forcefully once the world revolution no longer seemed on the horizon. Take for example the following letter of 26 March 1922, addressed to Vyacheslav Molotov, later a key member of Stalin's regime: 'If we do not close our eyes to reality we must admit that at the present the proletarian policy of the Party is not determined by the character of its membership, but by *the enormous undivided prestige enjoyed by the small group which might be called the Old Guard of the Party*. A slight conflict within this group will be enough, if not to destroy this prestige, at all events to weaken the group to such a degree as to rob it of its power to determine policy'.⁷⁷ This was followed by suggestions to Molotov on making it more difficult to join the Communist party.⁷⁸

How could Lenin on the one hand write of grassroots democracy in *State and Revolution* and on the other write in that letter to Molotov that the 'proletarian' nature of the Soviet Union rested not on mass participation from below but rather on 'the Old Guard of the Party'?⁷⁹ Part of the answer lies in the dire economic and social situation facing Russia in 1922, with the working class severely demoralised and Lenin seeking simply to hold onto power for a few years until a revolution in Germany or elsewhere could end the economic strangulation of Russia by the Western countries, as well as its general isolation. But what made Lenin want to hold onto power rather than allow the Soviet Union to fall, if necessary? The answer to this question is not obvious. If he had been from the start after power alone, why did he not accept a compromise in the spring of 1917 that would have given him a post in the provisional government, as some of his fellow Bolsheviks such as Stalin and Kamenev urged at the time? If Lenin was more than a mere opportunist, as the entire record of his life and work suggests, then how could he manage, even partially, to square the notion of soviet democracy with those of one-man management in the economy and rule by the old guard of the party in the political sphere?

Part of the answer may lie in one element of Lenin's theorising that remained elitist even in 1917 and that was not subjected to any fundamental dialectical rethinking after his 1914–15 study of Hegel: his concept of the vanguard party,

77 *CW* 33:257; emphasis added.

78 Samuel Farber goes so far as to argue that 'it was not during the Civil War but the period from 1921 to 1922 ... that the one-party state was completely and fully established' (Farber 1990, p. 28). Farber has a fairly good discussion of the rise and fall of the soviets as organs of mass self-rule in the years 1917 to 1922.

79 It should be noted that Molotov went on to become one of Stalin's most ruthless and durable lieutenants, no doubt viewing Lenin's letter as at least a partial justification for his actions. See, for example, the recently published Molotov 1993, where he brags about how many personal letters he received from Lenin during this period.

as first elaborated in 1902 in *What Is to Be Done?* Although that concept was certainly modified considerably afterward, and in 1917 the notion of the party to lead almost disappeared from his writings, Lenin never worked out a newer, more dialectical concept of organisation. As Dunayevskaya suggests: 'Unfortunately the great transformation in Lenin, both on philosophy and on the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat, did not extend to Lenin's concept of the party, which, despite all modifications in actual revolutions, remained essentially what it was in 1903'.⁸⁰ Lenin's vanguardist conceptions were included prominently in the twenty-one conditions of membership approved at the 1920 Second Congress of the Third International, point twelve of which reads: 'Parties belonging to the Third International must be built up on the principle of democratic *centralism*. At the present time of acute civil war, the communist party will only be able fully to do its duty when it is organised in the most centralised manner, if it has iron discipline, bordering on military discipline, and if the party center is a powerful, authoritative organ with wide powers, possessing the general trust of the party membership'.⁸¹ During the debate over this point at the Second Congress, Zinoviev, who gave the main report in the session on the role of the Communist party, went further. He made the existence of the Bolsheviks as a vanguard party nothing less than the key to the success of the 1917 revolution itself: 'The experience of the Russian revolution is much discussed. The most important experience of this revolution is that had we not had a centralised party built along military lines, with iron discipline, organised over the course of twenty years, by now we doubtless would have been defeated twenty times over'.⁸² If Lenin had any disagreements with this position, he did not express them. This is the major gap in Lenin's post-1914 dialectics of revolution. In many respects the concept of the party came to predominate over the other features of his Marxism after 1918.

Perhaps a passage from Hegel's *Science of Logic* that, as shown earlier, Lenin copied in his Hegel Notebooks but did not really discuss will help to illuminate Lenin's later failure to rethink fundamentally his concept of the party to lead:

It will always stand out as a marvel how the Kantian philosophy recognised the relations of thought to sensuous reality, beyond which it did not advance, as only a relative relation of mere Appearance [blossen Erscheinung], and perfectly well recognised and enunciated a higher unity of both

80 Dunayevskaya 1991 [1982], p. 156.

81 'Conditions of Admission into the Communist International', in Gruber (ed.) 1972, p. 244.

82 Riddell (ed.) 1991, pp. 150–1.

in the Idea in general and, for example, in the Idea of an *intuitive understanding* [*anschauendes Verstehens*], and yet stopped short at this relative relation and the assertion that the Notion is and remains utterly separate from reality – thus asserting as *truth* what it declared to be finite cognition, and denouncing as an unjustified extravagance and a figment of thought what it recognised as *truth* and of which it established the specific notion.⁸³

Using Hegel's dialectical language from this passage, it could be argued that Lenin 'stopped short' in his theorising instead of following it through to its conclusion. The notion of a dialectical view of the world developed in his Hegel Notebooks was kept in a compartment separate from one major aspect of his reality, the concept of the party to lead. As Hegel argues, however, there are no exceptions to dialectical method if one is not to fall backward into a Kantian dualism rooted in a mere intuitive understanding.

Is it not that type of merely intuitive understanding that Zinoviev expressed, and even that extremely crudely: we Bolsheviks had a vanguard party, we also had a successful revolution, and *therefore* the vanguard party is the decisive factor? Zinoviev does not make an analysis; rather, he makes an intuitive assertion based on unreflective experience.⁸⁴ Even in his post-1914 writings, however, during the period in which he embraced Hegelian dialectics, Lenin offers no real alternative to, and even encourages, such undialectical thinking on the concept of the party.

Not only does Lenin fail to rethink fundamentally his concept of the party to lead. When he gets down to a concrete analysis of the danger of bureaucracy in the 1920s, he cannot bring himself to apply, for example, his Hegel-derived concept of 'transformation into opposite' to his own Bolshevik party, now in

83 SL 592; emphasis added.

84 Trotsky, who, as we have seen, had little interest in Hegelian dialectics, made a veritable theoretical category out of intuition: 'No great work is possible without intuition – that is, without a subconscious sense which, although it may be developed and enriched by theoretical and practical work, must be ingrained in the very nature of the individual. Neither theoretical education nor practical routine can replace [it] ... This gift takes on decisive importance at a time of abrupt changes and breaks – the conditions of revolution. The events of 1905 revealed in me, I believe, this revolutionary intuition, and enabled me to rely on its assumed support during my later life'. See Trotsky 1931, p. 185. Trotsky also applied this category to Lenin, writing that for the latter, 'materialist dialectics' was 'necessary but not sufficient'. Lenin also 'needed that mysterious creative power that we call intuition'. See Trotsky 1925, p. 193. From the standpoint of Hegel's *Science of Logic*, such thinking could be characterised as an example of Kantian dualism.

power,⁸⁵ even though he had been able to use that concept to analyse the degeneration of the Second International into a bureaucratic and reformist organisation. Nevertheless, when it came to his own Bolsheviks in 1922–3 in a decidedly non-revolutionary situation, he stopped short and did not carry his incipient critique to its conclusion.

Regardless of whether such a party may have been needed for underground revolutionaries in tsarist Russia, although that too is of course open to question, and whether the centralisation of War Communism and its dictatorial features were necessary to save the revolution from its enemies during the civil war, Luxemburg's early and perceptive critique of Bolshevism still carries much weight. She wrote it from her jail cell in 1918 and never published it during her lifetime,⁸⁶ but it has since become a widely read document. Although generally supportive of the Bolshevik Revolution, she hit out at its over-centralisation and lack of internal democracy:

But socialist democracy is not something which begins only in the promised land after the foundations of socialist economy are created; it does not come as some sort of Christmas present for the worthy people who, in the interim, have loyally supported a handful of socialist dictators ...

Doubtless the Bolsheviks would have proceeded in this very way were it not that they suffered under the frightful compulsion of the world war, the German occupation and all the abnormal difficulties connected therewith, things which were inevitably bound to distort any socialist policy, however imbued it might be with the best intentions and the finest principles ...

The danger begins only when they make a virtue of necessity and want to freeze into a complete theoretical system all the tactics forced upon them by these fatal circumstances, and want to recommend them to the international proletariat as a model of socialist tactics.⁸⁷

In thus raising the issue of revolutionary democracy after the revolution, while at the same time advocating soviets and workers councils rather than parlia-

85 Lenin's concept of 'transformation into opposite' was used later in this way by Dunayevskaya when she developed from 1941 onward her concept of Stalin's Russia as a totalitarian state-capitalist society. See especially her writings collected in Dunayevskaya 1992.

86 Although for years many stories to the contrary were told, there is today little doubt that Luxemburg intended to publish her critique, as she indicates in newly discovered 1918 letters to Polish colleagues. See Tych (ed.) 1991, pp. 357–66.

87 Luxemburg 1961, pp. 77–9.

mentary democracy, Luxemburg went further than anyone else at the time in developing a sympathetic critique of Bolshevism. This is especially true of her call for a multitendency revolutionary democracy: 'Freedom only for the supporters of the government, only for the members of one party – however numerous they may be – is no freedom at all. Freedom is always and exclusively freedom for the one who thinks differently'.⁸⁸ Her critique of the single-party state remains a most original and prescient one, unusual because it does not dismiss the Bolshevik Revolution entirely but rather makes an immanent, internal critique that goes to some of the very assumptions of Bolshevism.⁸⁹

Despite their limitations, Lenin's writings on the state and revolution remain an important contribution to the dialectics of revolution. In pointing to the growth of the centralised capitalist state and to its dialectical opposite, the creation from below of direct forms of mass self-rule such as soviets, Lenin was able to work out a truly dialectical theory of revolution. I have argued that it was rooted at least in part in the concept of subjectivity developed in his Hegel Notebooks. The enduring significance of the concept of soviets is seen in the fact that, since 1917, soviets and workers' councils have appeared many other times, not only in the period immediately following the 1917 revolution, as was the case in Italy and Germany, but also in such varied revolutionary situations as Hungary in 1956, France in 1968, Portugal in 1974–75, and Iran in 1978–79. Lenin is not the only Marxist to develop a theory of soviets and workers' councils, but his *State and Revolution* remains one of the most important treatments of that issue. Despite possessing these original and liberatory features, however, Lenin's conception of the state and revolution remains a somewhat contradictory and ambivalent one because of his failure to work out a dialectical critique of his earlier concept of the party to lead. The latter, which remained part of Bolshevism even in 1917, although it was little mentioned then, soon reasserted itself forcefully. It led back toward centralisation, bureaucracy, and the indefinite perpetuation of a single-party state.

88 Luxemburg 1961, p. 69.

89 Even in this brilliant essay, however, Luxemburg falls into her old dogmatism on the national question. For example, elsewhere in *The Russian Revolution* she refers to the notion of national independence for Ukraine as an example of Bolshevik 'tomfoolery' and sarcastically dismisses 'Lenin's hobby of an "independent Ukraine"' as a needless concession to a 'nationalist movement' that 'tore the proletariat loose from Russia' (Luxemburg 1961, p. 52).

PART 3

Lenin, Hegel, and Western Marxism



From the 1920s to 1953: Lukács, Lefebvre, and the Johnson-Forest Tendency

In this chapter I will trace some of the major discussions of Lenin's Hegel Notebooks, mainly by unorthodox Marxists, through the year of Stalin's death, 1953. First, I will argue that part of the reason for the relative obscurity of Lenin's Hegel Notebooks lies in the Stalinist ideologues' preference for Lenin's crudely materialist earlier work on dialectics rather than his subtler, innovative, and ground-breaking Hegel Notebooks. Second, I will show that some important Hegelian Marxists, such as Antonio Gramsci, Karl Korsch, Georg Lukács, Ernst Bloch, Henri Lefebvre, C.L.R. James, and Raya Dunayevskaya, did discuss Lenin's Hegel Notebooks during the period from the 1920s to 1953, with varying degrees of penetration and originality. Third, it will be seen that, with the exception of Herbert Marcuse, Frankfurt School Critical Theorists avoided discussion of Lenin's Hegel Notebooks, as did French existentialists such as Jean-Paul Sartre and Maurice Merleau-Ponty. This was so despite the interest of both Critical Theorists and existentialists in the Hegel-Marx relationship. I hope that tracing this international discussion will help to unravel both the importance and, to date, relative obscurity of Lenin's Hegel Notebooks.

1 Lenin and Hegel in the Soviet Union in the 1920s

A few of Lenin's writings on Hegel were known during his lifetime, especially the 1921 article on trade unions, with its substantial discussion of Hegelian dialectics, and the 1922 article for *Under the Banner of Marxism*, which had called for the systematic study of Hegel's works. The Hegel Notebooks, however, lay unpublished and unknown during his lifetime. The 1915 essay fragment 'On the Question of Dialectics' was published in 1925, a year after Lenin's death, but it did not point directly to the Hegel Notebooks, since the editors wrongly attributed it to the pre-1914 period. At first this fragment was connected not to the Hegel Notebooks but to *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*.

Lenin's 'Abstract of Hegel's *Science of Logic*' was first published in the Soviet Union in 1929, an inauspicious year for free intellectual debate, for that was the year of Stalin's victory over the last remaining opposition group within the Communist party, the Right Opposition led by Nikolai Bukharin. Lenin's

'Abstract' appeared for the first time as Volume 9 of *Leninski Sbornik* (*Lenin Miscellany*), a supplement to Lenin's collected works, under the editorship of Moscow's Marx-Engels-Lenin Institute.¹ Totalling over 150 printed pages of excerpts and commentary on the *Science of Logic*, these notes made public for the first time the depth and seriousness of Lenin's study of Hegel in 1914–15.

In the following year, 1930, additional notes by Lenin on Hegel from 1915–16, plus some other notes on philosophy, most of them on writers other than Hegel, were published as Volume 12 of the *Lenin Miscellany*. This volume contained about 80 additional pages of notes on Hegel, mainly on his *History of Philosophy*, plus a mass of other, far shorter sets of notes and commentary from 1915–16, including brief notes on Aristotle's *Metaphysics* (about 9 pages), on Ludwig Feuerbach's critique of Leibniz (about 12 pages), and on Ferdinand Lassalle's book on Greek philosophy (about 15 pages). Thus, among the 1914–16 material as a whole, the largest of the entries that are not related to Hegel is about 15 pages, whereas the notes on Hegel total about 230 pages.

Also included in the 1930 volume are over 200 pages of miscellaneous pre-1914 material on philosophical issues, ranging from an 1895 set of notes on Marx and Engels's *Holy Family* to other notes on materialism and science made in 1903–11, most of the latter connected to Lenin's *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*. The addition of this bulk, three-fourths of it not even notebooks but simply facsimiles of pages of books and articles in which Lenin made marginal notes, tends to minimise the centrality of Lenin's return to Hegel in 1914. This effect becomes even more pronounced in later editions of these notebooks, when the two philosophical volumes of *Lenin Miscellany* were combined into one single volume entitled *Philosophical Notebooks*, with an introduction hardly mentioning Hegel at all.

In 1927 Marx's *1844 Manuscripts* had also been published for the first time anywhere, in a Russian-language edition. In the Soviet Union, however, the discussion of Lenin's Hegel Notebooks and Marx's *1844 Manuscripts* was overshadowed by the continuing debate over Engels's unfinished and scientistic book *Dialectics of Nature*, first published in 1925, in Russian. Thus, what little discussion there was of Lenin's Hegel Notebooks was bound up with other debates within Russian academic philosophy during the 1920s.

The philosophers at the Institute of Red Professorship grouped around Abram Deborin did have some interest in studying Hegel directly, but they had even more interest in Engels's *Dialectics of Nature*. Deborin published extracts

1 For more details on the 1929–30 publication of the Hegel Notebooks, see Burkhard 1986a, pp. 241–7.

from Lenin's Hegel Notebooks in the leading Russian philosophical journal *Under the Banner of Marxism* as early as 1925, but the full publication of the Hegel Notebooks was delayed until 1929, a delay about which Deborin's group complained. Unlike their opponents in Soviet academic philosophy, whom they dubbed 'mechanists',² the Deborinites did call for the serious study of Hegelian dialectics by Marxists, following the suggestions by Lenin in the 1922 article in *Under the Banner of Marxism*. At the same time, possibly to protect themselves from charges of excessive Hegelianism, the Deborinites joined in the virulent attacks that began in 1924 against the Western Marxists Lukács and Korsch. Despite the brief ascendancy of the Deborinites in Soviet academic philosophy for a period in the late 1920s, the major political leaders who were also considered to be Marxist theorists, such as Bukharin and Trotsky³ – and who held positions closer to those of the mechanists – remained tremendously influential until they were ousted from the leadership by Stalin.

Even when Soviet philosophers commented on Lenin and Hegel, the stress was on Lenin's 'materialistic' reading of Hegel, not on the new vantage points he developed as a result of studying Hegel in 1914–15.⁴ These debates in the 1920s on Lenin's relation to Hegel took place in an atmosphere where philosophical dispute was to a considerable extent detached from political factionalism. Until 1929 or 1930, 'partyiness' in philosophy tended to mean merely adherence to the perspectives of Marx and Engels, not to a specifically Bolshevik position, let alone to a Trotskyist, Stalinist, or Bukharinist one. A whole range of views existed, all of which were debated in Soviet philosophical journals. By the early 1930s, however, when Lenin's *Philosophical Notebooks* and Marx's 1844 *Manuscripts* began to be published in German and other Western languages, philosophical discussion in Russia had been effectively closed by Stalin. After having used the Deborinites in 1929 to attack his rival Bukharin as a mechanist, Stalin then turned on the Deborinites in 1930, branding them 'Menshevizing idealists', a reference both to their interest in Hegel and to Deborin's Menshevik past.

From that point on Stalinist dogmatism and dictatorial methods snuffed out most independent intellectual debate within Soviet Marxist institutes and journals. Stalin's new chief philosopher, M.B. Mitin, declared that not Hegel but

2 René Ahlberg writes that 'the quarrel between Deborin and the Mechanists can be regarded as a controversy over the views of Engels. Marx was allowed almost no say at all' (Ahlberg 1962, p. 131).

3 See Bukharin 1925; Trotsky 1986. Each of these works shows a markedly scientific bent and either indifference or hostility toward Hegel.

4 See, for example, Adoratski 1929, pp. 633–59.

'the masterful application of dialectics that our party carries out' was henceforth to become the source of dialectics.⁵ As David Joravsky comments acidly: 'But now only Stalin and his compliant Central Committee had the requisite world-sweeping vision; lesser philosophers would wait to be told when experience required the Marxist *Weltanschauung* to be developed further'.⁶ This precluded any meaningful further discussion of Lenin and Hegel in Russia. In the same period, beginning in 1927, Lenin's *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* was translated and distributed widely within world Communism as the official 'Leninist' text on philosophy and dialectics. During the same period, Lenin's Hegel Notebooks, like Marx's 1844 *Manuscripts*, nearly passed into oblivion within the Soviet Union and the Stalinised Communist movement of the 1930s. At the same time, however, these texts began to draw interest among more independent writers on Marxism in the West.

Even before then, in the 1920s, the Hegelian Marxist Antonio Gramsci had attempted to launch a discussion of Lenin and Hegel in Italy. In 1924–6 Gramsci published several short texts by Lenin on Hegel in Italian Communist journals.⁷ One of them was the important essay fragment 'On the Question of Dialectics' from the Hegel Notebooks. Unfortunately, Gramsci was jailed by Mussolini in

5 Cited by Joravsky 1961, p. 256.

6 Ibid., p. 270. Most of this discussion on Russian Marxist philosophy in the 1920s is based on Joravsky's detailed and scrupulous treatment of these issues. For some of the actual documents in a Western language, see the German-language collection of 1920s articles edited by a leading second-generation Frankfurt School Critical Theorist, Oskar Negt: Deborin and Bukharin 1969. Negt, however, views the discussions by Deborin and Bukharin far more narrowly than does Joravsky, giving 'Marxism as a Science of Legitimation: On the Origins of Stalinist Philosophy' as the title to his long introduction to writings in the 1920s mainly by Deborin and Bukharin but including also brief selections from Lukács, Gramsci, Mitin, and Stalin, the latter two in 1930. He neither discusses Lenin's Hegel Notebooks nor includes anything from them in his collection. For a more recent but very uneven account, one that credits the Stalinist ideologue M.B. Mitin with originality in order to claim that Mao, who studied Mitin, was in fact a Hegelian, see Levine 1984, pp. 319–30. For a French treatment of this subject, see the 1983 collection edited by René Zapata, who was a student of Althusser. As with Negt's edition, Zapata's plays down Lenin's Hegel Notebooks.

7 I have not located any substantial discussion by Gramsci of Lenin on Hegel. None appears in Gramsci, *Opere*, vols. 11 and 12 (Gramsci 1966, 1978), which cover the years 1921–6. For a discussion of the relation of Gramsci's thought to Lenin's writings on Hegel, see Paggi 1979, especially pp. 133–7. A few years later, in 1931, the well-known Japanese Marxist philosopher Yoshitaro Omori published an article entitled "Hegeru to Reninizumu" (Omori 1931, pp. 43–60). This particular issue of *Riso*, a liberal intellectual journal, was entitled 'Hegel Renaissance'. Omori's article relied on some short pieces by Lenin on Hegel, as well as on the writings of Deborin and other Russian philosophers of the 1920s such as W. Adoratski and I. Luppel, all of which were published in German Communist journals during the 1920s. (I owe some of this information to a personal communication from Professor Narihiko Ito of Japan.)

1926, three years before the full Hegel Notebooks began to appear in Russian. It would be a long time until interest revived among Italian Marxists: the notebooks did not appear in Italian until 1958, burdened by an anti-Hegelian introduction by Lucio Colletti.⁸

Lenin's *Philosophical Notebooks* was published more quickly in other Western languages, beginning with a German edition in 1932. While it did not evoke anywhere near the discussion that Marx's 1844 *Manuscripts* did, there has been a serious and extended discussion about these notebooks ever since among Marxist intellectuals and those interested in Marxism in the West. The noted French sociologist Lucien Goldmann has described the overall influence of Lenin's Hegel Notebooks on Western Marxism:

Hegelian categories are all recovered in Marxism; and it is no accident that they were reactualised in Europe around, say, the years 1917–23: first by Lenin in the *Philosophical Notebooks*, secondly by Lukács in *History and Class Consciousness*, and thirdly, I believe, somewhat later in Gramsci's concretely philosophical analyses. Furthermore, it is not accidental that in the interim, with Mehring, Plekhanov, Kautsky, Bernstein and even Lenin at the time he wrote *Materialism and Empiriocriticism*, Marxism was just as positivistic as academic science. ... And if after 1923 this renaissance of dialectical thought subsequently ended, it was because the revolutionary period was clearly over: we know that with the 1923 defeat in Germany, after 1925–26, there was no longer any trace of this.⁹

As we will see, there was in fact more discussion of these issues in the 1930s than Goldmann acknowledges, but what is most important about his chronology is how he places Lenin's Hegel Notebooks at the center of some key writings of Western Marxism.

Since Lenin's name is incomparably better known than those of Lukács or Gramsci, and since official Moscow and other editions of Lenin's writings are easily available in numerous languages, why then are Lenin's Hegel Notebooks relatively little known? The answer lies in the sheer bulk of what has been published by and on Lenin and in the way in which Soviet commentators and other like-minded writers have emphasised Lenin's early mechanistic work, *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*. Amid all the great praise of Lenin as 'original', 'creative', 'great', a 'genius', and so on, that abounds in the Moscow editions of

8 Lenin 1958.

9 'The Dialectic Today' (1970), in Goldmann 1976, pp. 112–13.

and commentaries on Lenin, the Hegel Notebooks have been nearly buried, since they do not fit the mechanistic and scientistic view of Marxist dialectics that became dogma.¹⁰ As with Marx's 1844 *Manuscripts*, the most serious and probing discussion has occurred mainly outside the Soviet Union. It is this discussion to which I now turn.

2 Lenin and Hegel in Central Europe: Korsch, Lukács, and Bloch

Although Georg Lukács's *History and Class Consciousness* and Karl Korsch's *Marxism and Philosophy*, both published in German in 1923, are the two best-known Hegelian Marxist texts of the period, neither book refers directly to Lenin's at the time unpublished Hegel Notebooks. Nonetheless, these books were written, at least in part, on the basis of Lenin's own return to Hegel in 1914, for both authors were young members of Lenin's Third International. Lenin made a few public indications of his own return to Hegel in the early 1920s, just before his May 1922 stroke, which almost completely immobilised him until his death in January 1924, leaving only a few brief periods when he could speak and write, mainly in late 1922.

Lenin's references to Hegel did not go unnoticed by Korsch, who placed a quotation from Lenin's article for *Under the Banner of Marxism*, 'On the Significance of Militant Materialism' (1922), as the epigraph to his *Marxism and Philosophy*. The quotation from Lenin reads: 'We must organise a systematic study of the Hegelian dialectic from a materialist standpoint'.¹¹ Then, in the

10 In a prologue to his *Lenin*, vol. 1, entitled 'The Enigma of Lenin', Service perceptively suggests that the 'mountain of documents' in Lenin's *Collected Works* obscures as much as it reveals about Lenin's life and work (Service 1985, p. 3).

11 Korsch 1970 [1923, 1930], p. 29. In his lengthy introduction to Korsch 1979, editor Douglas Kellner objects to the use of the term 'Hegelian Marxism' with respect to Korsch: 'Korsch's defense of the importance of philosophy and his claim that understanding the relation between Marxism and philosophy requires grasping the Hegelian roots of Marxism has given rise to the interpretation of *Marxism and Philosophy* as a classic of "Hegelian Marxism" and has led to the picture of Korsch as one of the creators of a current that was in opposition to the dominant Marxist orthodoxy. What has not been perceived is the extent to which Korsch believed he was merely restoring Marxist orthodoxy. Further, he saw himself as part of a philosophical front with Lenin and Luxemburg, representing a position of revolutionary socialism against the reformist Marxism of the Second International. The publication of Lukács's *History and Class Consciousness*, which attempts to synthesize Lenin and Luxemburg into dialectical and revolutionary Marxist theory, could only strengthen Korsch's conviction that they – himself, Lukács, Lenin, and Luxemburg – represented genuine Marxism and constituted a theoretical-political front against Social

concluding paragraph of the main erratum in *Marxism and Philosophy*, Korsch cites Lenin's article again and writes: 'Just as political action is not rendered unnecessary by the economic action of a revolutionary class, so intellectual action is not rendered unnecessary by either political or economic action'.¹² There are no direct references to Lenin and Hegel in Lukács's *History and Class Consciousness*, which was published a bit earlier than Korsch's book. In Lukács's book the only significant discussion of Lenin is on the theory of imperialism and the concept of the vanguard party.

The response of both traditional social democratic Marxists such as Kautsky and the Comintern establishment to Lukács's and Korsch's Hegelian Marxism was one of unmitigated hostility. Both Grigory Zinoviev and Bukharin sharply attacked Lukács and Korsch by name at the 1924 Fifth World Congress of the Comintern. Although in fact their political positions at that time were closer to those of the Left Communists such as Anton Pannekoek, who had already quit the Comintern, Zinoviev's subsequently infamous speech linked them to social democracy and therefore 'revisionism':

Comrade Graziadei, in Italy, published a book containing a reprint of articles he wrote, when he was a Social-Democratic revisionist, attacking Marxism. This theoretical revisionism cannot be allowed to pass with impunity. Neither will we tolerate our Hungarian Comrade, Lukács, doing the same in the domain of philosophy and sociology. ... We have a similar tendency in the German Party. Comrade Graziadei is a professor, Korsch is also a – professor (Interruptions: 'Lukács is also a professor!'). If we get a few more of these professors spinning out their Marxist theories, we shall be lost. We cannot tolerate such theoretical revisionism of this kind in our Communist International.¹³

Democratic revisionism' (p. 35). Kellner is correct to stress Korsch's view, which was shared by Lukács, that he, along with Lenin, 'represented genuine Marxism' in 1923, as against the positivism of 'Social Democratic revisionism' and its more scientific concept of dialectics. In this study I am using the term 'Hegelian Marxism' not in the sense of necessarily meaning opposition to Lenin but in a far broader sense that includes Lenin's writings from 1914 on, as well as those of other Marxist theorists from the 1920s on, such as Korsch, Lukács, Gramsci, Marcuse, Bloch, Lefebvre, C.L.R. James, and Dunayevskaya. In my usage, Hegelian Marxism does not imply fundamental opposition to Lenin, since the whole thrust of this study is to show Lenin's Hegelian Marxism and its unexplored links with Western Marxism.

¹² Korsch 1970, p. 97.

¹³ *The Fifth Congress of the Comintern: Abridged Report* 1924, p. 17. In the draft programme that was approved at the Fifth Congress, there was an explicit attack against idealism, apparently aimed also at Lukács and Korsch: the Communist International 'conducts a

Despite their own interest in Hegel, Deborin and his colleagues quickly joined in the dogmatic attacks on Lukács and Korsch.

2.1 *Karl Korsch*

In 1930, having by then been expelled from the German Communist party, although not specifically for his philosophical views, Korsch answered his critics at length in a long introduction to a new edition of his *Marxism and Philosophy*. By this time his thought had evolved toward an open hostility to Lenin, both on the theory of the vanguard party and on dialectics. In this introduction Korsch accuses Lenin of having remained within the scientistic materialism of the 'Marxism of the Second International', whose 'spiritual legacy Lenin and his companions never abandoned, in spite of some things they said in the heat of battle'.¹⁴ Thus, to Korsch in 1930, Lenin's statements on Hegel, which Korsch had quoted in 1923, were now seen as only isolated ones made 'in the heat of battle'. He sums up the philosophical dispute of 1924 as one between 'the Leninist interpretation of Marx and Engels's materialism which had already been formally canonised in Russia' and those, like himself, who were alleged to have 'deviated from this canon in the direction of idealism, of Kant's critical epistemology and of Hegel's idealist dialectic'.¹⁵

What accounts for this apparent change of view toward Lenin's legacy by 1930? It is certainly possible that Korsch quoted Lenin on Hegel in 1923 only as a point of diplomacy toward his Russian comrades, never taking Lenin seriously as a dialectical thinker. It is also possible that his 1926 expulsion from the party, as well as the virulent attacks on him by Zinoviev, Deborin, and others, all in the name of 'Leninism', had helped to turn Korsch against Lenin by 1930.

There is, however, one additional possibility that may be equally central to Korsch's 1930 attacks, since it is a real theoretical issue: Lenin's early mechanistic book *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* appeared in German and other Western languages beginning in 1927, immediately gaining a wide circulation among Communists.¹⁶ It is in fact the only text by Lenin on dialectics that

consistent struggle against each and every kind of bourgeois influence on the proletariat – against religion, against idealist ... philosophy'.

14 Korsch 1970, p. 109. The English translation carries this 1930 introduction instead as an appendix.

15 Korsch 1970, pp. 120–1.

16 Lenin 1927b, which, as with the English edition that same year, carried a lengthy preface by Deborin as well as Nevsky's appendix, both of which were dropped from later editions. It also carried Lenin's 1915 essay fragment 'On the Question of Dialectics', wrongly attributed to the pre-1914 period. That essay first appeared in German in *Unter dem Banner des Marxismus* 2 (1925): 412–15.

Korsch cites in 1930. Thus it may be that, for Korsch, Lenin's extremely mechanistic book, available only in Russian before 1927, came to overshadow Lenin's brief post-1914 writings on Hegel that had inspired Korsch in 1923. Korsch seems to say as much in an essay entitled 'Lenin's Philosophy' (1938), where he writes that when Lenin's *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* appeared, 'there was not so much open hostility as indifference and, even more awkward, just among those whose applause would have been most cherished, a kind of polite embarrassment'.¹⁷ Earlier, in his 1930 critique of Lenin, Korsch does not show any awareness of Lenin's fuller Hegel Notebooks, which did not appear in German until 1932. Korsch's rejection of Lenin as a Marxist philosopher thus appears to have been made mainly on the basis of *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*, without his having read the Hegel Notebooks.¹⁸

In 1938 in 'Lenin's Philosophy', Korsch's last important discussion of Lenin on dialectics, he does briefly take up Lenin's Hegel Notebooks, although he downplays their importance and takes *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* as his main point of departure. On the Hegel Notebooks, he writes: 'The recent publication by the Marx-Engels-Lenin Institute of Lenin's philosophical papers dated from 1914 et seq. shows the first germs of that particular significance which during the last phases of Lenin's activity and after his death the philosophical thought of Hegel assumed in Lenin's "materialistic philosophy"'.¹⁹ Unlike his position in 1923, however, when Korsch had seen Hegel's philosophy as revolutionary, here he stresses the 'bourgeois character' both of Hegel's philosophy and of the Russian Revolution. As Patrick Goode suggests, the latter point is in keeping with Korsch's view by the 1930s that in the Russian Revolution 'Leninism was merely an ideological form assumed by the bourgeois revolution in an underdeveloped country'.²⁰

In this vein, Korsch writes an epitaph for Lenin's Hegel Notebooks with regard to their relevance to Marxism outside Russia:

17 This essay is included in Pannekoek 1975, p. 111. The authorship is wrongly attributed to Paul Mattick. See Helena Sheehan's clarification of this issue in Sheehan 1985, p. 150.

18 See Goode 1979, pp. 123–5, which makes some of these points with regard to Korsch and the Hegel Notebooks. Goode suggests, correctly in my view, that in 1930 Korsch 'does not take into account all the complexities of Lenin's position, nor see it as a whole' (p. 123). Goode does not stress enough the fact that these notebooks were unavailable in German in 1930. Nor does he mention the tremendous negative impact of *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* on Korsch and other Western Marxists.

19 Korsch, 'Lenin's Philosophy', in Pannekoek 1975, pp. 114–15.

20 Goode 1979, p. 135.

A belated revival of the whole of the formerly disowned *idealistic dialectics of Hegel* served to reconcile the acceptance by the Leninists of old bourgeois materialism with the formal demands of an apparently anti-bourgeois and proletarian revolutionary tendency. ... Thus the whole circle not only of bourgeois materialistic thought but of all bourgeois philosophical thought from Holbach to Hegel was actually repeated by the Russian dominated phase of the Marxist movement, which passed from the adoption of 18th century and Feuerbachian materialism by Plekhanov and Lenin in the pre-war period to Lenin's appreciation of the 'intelligent idealism' of Hegel and other bourgeois philosophers of the 19th century as against the 'unintelligent materialism' of the earlier 18th-century philosophers.²¹

Thus the Russians were at the stage only of West European development in the nineteenth century, and their revolution was the equivalent of the French 'bourgeois' revolution of 1789, which had been followed in thought by Hegel's critique of both eighteenth-century rationalism and Kant's critical philosophy. For Korsch, Lenin's turn to Hegel beginning in 1914 was no longer seen, as it had been in 1923, as part of the road toward a new Marxist dialectic of revolution for Western Europe. Instead, it was merely an expression of the backwardness of Russian economic and philosophic development.

In this sense, Korsch has by 1938 come full circle from the view he had expressed not only of Lenin but also of Hegel in the 1923 edition of his *Marxism and Philosophy*. By the 1930s Korsch rejects both Lenin and Hegel. In addition, he downplays to a surprising degree Marx's newly published 1844 *Manuscripts*, as can be seen in his *Karl Marx* (1938), which was written for a scholarly publisher.²² His rejection of Lenin on Hegel was thus also a general move away from the stress on Hegelian dialectics within Marxism altogether, something that Korsch himself had helped to pioneer for a new generation in 1923.

21 Korsch, 'Lenin's Philosophy', in Pannokoek 1975, p. 115.

22 Korsch 1938. Goode writes in his *Karl Korsch*: 'Korsch knew of the [1844] *Manuscripts*, as he refers to them in *Karl Marx*, but he did not subject them to a rigorous analysis. This is rather disappointing, given that *Marxism and Philosophy* had drawn attention to the Hegelian antecedents of Marx's work, which were more prominent in the *Manuscripts* than in perhaps anything else Marx wrote' (Goode 1979, p. 139).

2.2 *Georg Lukács*

The path of Lukács, who remained in the Hungarian Communist party even after it was completely Stalinised²³ and who made frequent self-criticisms, was, at least on the surface, quite different from Korsch's with respect to Lenin and Hegel. Lukács spent most of his time until 1945 living in the Soviet Union. His 1924 testament to Lenin covers many issues – his own self-critique of his earlier Left Communist views and Lenin's concepts of the party, imperialism, and the state and revolution – but surprisingly, it does not present Lenin as a Hegelian Marxist or even take up the issue of Lenin and Hegel. Even though he praises Lenin as 'the greatest thinker to have been produced by the revolutionary working-class movement since Marx' and writes that 'the analysis of Lenin's policy always leads us back to the basic question of dialectical method', Lukács concludes by stressing Lenin as a practising dialectician only: 'Leninism means that the theory of historical materialism has moved still nearer the daily battles of the proletariat, that it has become more practical than it could be at the time of Marx'.²⁴

Lukács's emphasis is thus not on a claim that Lenin made an original contribution to Hegelian-Marxian dialectics. It is unclear whether this non-discussion of Lenin and Hegel was merely a prudent response to the virulent attacks on *History and Class Consciousness* for alleged Hegelian idealism or whether it reflected Lukács's private assessment of Lenin as dialectician as well. Certainly Lukács would have been at least as aware as was Korsch of Lenin's public statements in the early 1920s on the need to study Hegel directly, but he too may not yet have known about the full extent of Lenin's 1914–15 Hegel Notebooks. Nevertheless, more than lack of knowledge of Lenin's work on Hegel or fear of attack by people such as Zinoviev may be at issue here, for as late as 1967, long after Lukács had read Lenin's Hegel Notebooks and, as we will see in a moment, claimed them as a major inspiration for his book *The Young Hegel* (1948), Lukács remained a bit reticent on Lenin's notebooks. This is seen in a postscript to a

23 Löwy's chapter 'Lukács and Stalinism' in Löwy 1979, pp. 193–213, offers an interesting, brief account of the twists and turns of Lukács's political and theoretical positions after 1924. Unfortunately, however, Löwy sees Hegel's influence in far too one-sided a fashion, almost blaming Hegel for Lukács's reconciliation with Stalinism beginning in the late 1920s: 'Now, at the end of his revolutionary period, Lukács fell back into Hegel's "reconciliation" with reality' (p. 195). This implies wrongly that *History and Class Consciousness* was less Hegelian than was Lukács's later work, such as *The Young Hegel*. What was at stake was, instead, the appropriation of different elements from Hegel by Lukács in the two periods.

24 Lukács 1971b [1924], pp. 9, 87–8.

new edition of the 1924 book on Lenin, where Lukács once again stresses that 'for Lenin, even the most general philosophical categories ... were constantly geared to practice, as vehicles of theoretical preparation for it'.²⁵ He also writes: 'At the outbreak of war in 1914, after a series of adventures with the police, he landed up in Switzerland. Once arrived, he decided that his first task was to make the best use of this "holiday" and to study Hegel's *Logic*. ... Through his life, Lenin was always learning; whether it was from Hegel's *Logic* or from the opinion of a worker on bread'.²⁶ Lenin's Hegel Notebooks are here treated more as an interesting biographical fact than as a major theoretical work in dialectics.

There is a discussion of Lenin's Hegel Notebooks in Lukács's second major book on dialectics, *The Young Hegel*. This book deals systematically with Hegel's *Phenomenology of Mind* (1807) and the writings that preceded it. Lenin's notebooks on Hegel are somewhat peripheral to the topic of Lukács's book, since Lenin dealt only with Hegel's later works, beginning with the *Science of Logic* (1812–16). Nonetheless, Lukács may have considered *The Young Hegel* to have been inspired in part by Lenin's Hegel Notebooks, at least according to a book on Lukács's life and thought by one of his former students, István Mészáros. In his biographical chronology for the years 1929–31, Mészáros writes:

In Moscow he works at the Marx-Engels-Lenin Institute, directed by D. Riazanov. The latter shows him the full typescript of Marx's *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844* before publication: It has a major impact on Lukács' intellectual development. In the same period he gets acquainted with Lenin's *Philosophical Notebooks*, published in 1929/30 under the title of *Lenin Miscellanies IX & XII*. These writings, too, greatly contribute to the modification of his conception of Hegel and of his view of 'subject-object relations', of epistemology and of the relationship between the work of art and social reality.²⁷

From 1931 to 1933 Lukács lived in Germany, but then he fled the Nazis and returned to Moscow. For the years 1933–5 Mészáros writes: 'He is working on *The Young Hegel* (completed only in the winter of 1937–38): a project conceived during the period of rethinking his earlier philosophical views in the light of the [Marx's 1844] *Paris Manuscripts* and the *Philosophical Notebooks*. (Also in Berlin, between 1931/33, he tried to work on this project but could not get very far with it.)'²⁸ Although Mészáros states that *The Young Hegel* was completed by

25 Lukács 1971b [1924], p. 96.

26 Lukács 1971b [1924], pp.97–98

27 Mészáros 1972, p. 137.

28 Ibid., p. 139.

1938, it is first published in 1948 by a leading Western publisher, Europa Verlag. In his preface to a second edition, published for the first time in East Germany in 1954, only a year after Stalin's death, Lukács writes that the 'book was completed in late Autumn 1938'.²⁹

Lukács does not mention the heightened persecutions he suffered from 1939 on, including several months under arrest in Moscow as a 'Trotskyist agent' in 1941. This was undoubtedly by far the biggest factor preventing his book's publication in those years. Especially after its publication in East Germany, the book came under sharp attack by Stalinist philosophers for whom, as Iring Fetscher recounts: 'The enemies are the Hegelian Marxists who would try to smuggle the Trojan horse of idealism into the beleaguered fortress of Soviet materialism under the cover of Hegelian dialectics'.³⁰

My concern here is with the fact that Lukács's *Young Hegel* contains a brief chapter that is probably the first attempt by a major Central European Marxist thinker to grapple with Lenin's Hegel Notebooks. *The Young Hegel* is one of the great works on the dialectic in Hegel and Marx, and it probably should rank in importance alongside *History and Class Consciousness*. Lukács's concern is to elaborate and analyse the affinities between Hegel and Marx, thus overcoming the one-sided views of both conservative Hegel scholars and vulgar Marxists.

Lukács discusses Lenin and Hegel mainly in a brief chapter entitled 'Labour and the Problem of Teleology'. He takes up an early version of the chapter on teleology in Hegel's *Science of Logic*, which Hegel delivered as lectures in 1805–6, just as the *Phenomenology* was being completed. As we saw in Chapter 3, Hegel's concept of teleology involves a notion of internally generated causality for human behaviour. For the mature Hegel of the *Science of Logic*, 'teleology is especially contrasted with mechanism ... [where] no *self-determination* is manifested'.³¹

Lukács proceeds to discuss a passage in Hegel's teleology chapter in the *Logic* that links human labour to the development of the idea, a passage where Hegel focuses on the plough as 'more honourable than those enjoyments which are procured from it'. The passage was quoted by Lenin in his Hegel Notebooks.³² Lukács notes that Lenin connected this passage to Marx's notion of historical materialism. Lukács therefore stresses that for Hegel in the *Logic*, 'teleology,

29 Lukács 1975, p. xi.

30 Fetscher 1971, p. 128. Fetscher's whole discussion (pp. 104–47) of the debates in Eastern Europe and Russia over Lukács and Bloch in the 1950s is quite informative.

31 *SL* 734.

32 *SL* 747; *CW* 38:189.

human labor and human praxis' are concepts that overcome the narrow limits of mechanism.³³

After quoting some other passages from the Hegel Notebooks, where Lenin 'translates' Hegel's statements into 'materialist dialectics', Lukács suggests that Lenin's discussion here relates to Marx's 'Theses on Feuerbach'. There, writes Lukács, Marx holds that 'the great achievement of German classical idealism was to develop the "active side" of reality which had been neglected by the older forms of materialism'.³⁴ Thus, having touched on idealism, Lukács seems to move quickly to cover himself against the incessant attacks on his own work as idealist made ever since the 1920s.

At this point Lukács brings in Lenin's discussion in the Hegel Notebooks of the section of the *Science of Logic* entitled 'The Idea of the Good'. As I discussed in Chapter 3, this section directly precedes the book's concluding chapter, 'The Absolute Idea'. Lukács stresses once again the concept of activity in Hegel's thought, finding there what he now terms 'the concrete superiority of the practical over the theoretical Idea'.³⁵ Although immediately following this Lukács mentions another key notion in Hegel's text – 'the practical Idea still lacks the moment of the theoretical Idea',³⁶ a passage that Lenin does not quote – Lenin's overall stress here, which Lukács follows, is not on the move from the practical to the theoretical idea. Rather, it is on practice only.

Lukács admiringly recapitulates Lenin's view that 'for Hegel action, practice, is a *logical* 'syllogism', a figure of logic', and that 'Marx, consequently, clings to Hegel, introducing the criteria of practice into the theory of knowledge. Cf. Theses on Feuerbach'.³⁷ Lukács concludes this brief discussion by stating that all of this has shown that for Hegel, 'the connections between final causes and man's economic activities in particular and – branching out from there – human praxis in general ... [are] of cardinal importance for his entire philosophical system'.³⁸ Here the concept of practice, of activity, predominates over the dialectic as a whole, and idealism is referred to positively only in the sense of action or practice. Thus, despite the more sophisticated framework in which the discussion is developed, we are really not so far here from Lukács's earlier view of Lenin as more 'practical' than Marx.

33 Lukács 1975, p. 349.

34 Lukács 1975, p. 350.

35 Ibid.

36 *SL* 821.

37 *CW* 38:212, 217.

38 Lukács 1975, p. 351.

In passing references elsewhere in *The Young Hegel* to Lenin's *Philosophical Notebooks*, Lukács does address the issue of idealism versus materialism in a way that implies at least some critique of the reigning Stalinist notion of dialectical materialism. He cites Lenin's essay fragment 'On the Question of Dialectics' from the *Philosophical Notebooks*, quoting Lenin to the effect that 'philosophical idealism is only nonsense from the standpoint of crude, simple, metaphysical materialism', as well as Lenin's qualification that 'idealism is clerical obscurantism'. Then Lukács adds his own comment: 'With his usual precision Lenin points to both sides of the problem. He makes it quite clear that the idealist approach necessarily entails religious, clerical overtones'.³⁹ This is an incredibly one-sided interpretation by a thinker who had once admired the decidedly nonclerical neo-idealism of German social theorists such as Wilhelm Dilthey and Max Weber and who had attacked mechanical materialism in his own *History and Class Consciousness*.⁴⁰

In the 1920s Lukács had seen Marx's dialectic more as the unity of idealism and materialism. In *The Young Hegel* Lukács invariably treats Lenin's *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* as very nearly equivalent to the 1914–15 Hegel Notebooks. Lukács writes at one point in *The Young Hegel* that 'in *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* and his *Philosophical Notebooks* Lenin provides the foundations for a dialectical approach to the objectivity of knowledge'.⁴¹ Thus, Lukács does not discuss the many passages in Lenin's Hegel Notebooks that have been taken up since World War II by other theorists, who have usually stressed Lenin's break in 1914 with the old materialism. Lukács gives us instead an interpretation of Lenin's concept of dialectic where mechanical materialism and Hegelian Marxism cohabit.⁴²

39 Lukács 1975, p. 270.

40 It is no doubt this type of discussion that led Fetscher to ascribe the change in Lukács – from the earlier, more original *History and Class Consciousness* of 1923 to the later period of *The Young Hegel* – to Lukács's supposed 'sworn fidelity to the doctrine of Engels and Lenin by the 1930s'. See Fetscher 1971, p. 104.

41 Lukács 1975, p. 510.

42 In one of the few treatments of Lukács's relation to Lenin, Norman Levine has argued in a contrary fashion that 'Leninism, in Lukács' terms, turned away from metaphysical materialism and found in the *Philosophical Notebooks* a repudiation of *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*' (Levine 1978, p. 29). I could find no textual evidence for such a claim, either in *The Young Hegel* or in *Lenin: A Study of the Unity of His Thought*, and Levine provides no reference for his statement. If true, it would make Lukács's assessment of the evolution of Lenin's thought similar to that of many of the other Western Marxists.

2.3 Ernst Bloch

In 1949 another major work on Hegel and Marx, Ernst Bloch's *Subjekt-Objekt*, appeared in an East German edition.⁴³ Whereas Lukács had written on the young Hegel, Bloch's Marxist reading ranges over the whole of Hegel's work, taking up the *Phenomenology*, the *Science of Logic*, and other works such as the *Philosophy of Religion* and *Philosophy of History*. At this time Bloch, like Lukács, expressed orthodox Communist views on political issues but did not always do so on philosophical ones, despite the fact that Bloch and his supporters for a time controlled the major official East German journal, *Zeitschrift für Philosophie*. According to Bloch's 1952 preface to *Subjekt-Objekt*, he actually composed much of the book in Cambridge, Massachusetts, before moving to East Germany in 1949. In the 1960s Bloch moved to West Germany, but he never gave up his commitment to Marxism, supporting, for example, the radical student movement of 1968. In the postscript to a 1962 West German edition of the book, he wrote that 'in the East today Hegel is no longer popular'.⁴⁴

Bloch makes a few references to Lenin's Hegel Notebooks in *Subjekt-Objekt*, but they are not central to his book. He also makes occasional references to Stalin, such as writing that the categories of Hegel's *Logic* are important in the work 'of Marx and Engels, of Lenin and Stalin'.⁴⁵ In his preface Bloch writes that Hegel was 'one of Marx's teachers' and that 'a person who would study the historical-materialist dialectic by leaving out Hegel has no prospect of fully mastering historical-dialectical materialism'.⁴⁶ In a chapter entitled 'Hegel's Death and Life', he claims the heritage of Hegel for Marxism, lamenting the decline of Hegelianism within European and especially German academic philosophy and sociology after 1850. On the other hand, he writes, Hegel's thought lived on within the Marxist movement, especially in Lenin's work: 'Lenin renewed authentic Marxism not least by a return to the "root" of Hegelian dialectics ... as well as to Hegel's Logic itself'.⁴⁷ Bloch quotes several passages from Lenin's Hegel Notebooks, including the well-known one on the need to study Hegel's *Logic* to grasp fully Marx's *Capital*.

At another point Bloch singles out Lenin's great concern with Hegel's concept of the practical idea near the end of the *Science of Logic*. Arguing in a way

43 Bloch 1962 [1949]. For the history and background of this work and its extremely negative reception in East Germany by the Stalinist ideologues, see Hudson 1982, pp. 13–14, and Fetscher 1971, pp. 109–31.

44 Bloch 1962 [1949], p. 13.

45 Bloch 1962 [1949], p. 162.

46 Bloch 1962 [1949], p. 12.

47 Bloch 1962 [1949], pp. 382–3.

similar to Lukács's approach in *The Young Hegel*, Bloch connects this to the Marxist concept of the unity of theory and practice, with the emphasis on practice: 'Theory leads to concrete practice'.⁴⁸ But whereas Lukács seems to leave the question at the level of the primacy of practice over theory in Lenin's Hegel Notebooks, Bloch goes on to take up as well the more controversial passages where Lenin writes that Hegel's idealism is greater than crude materialism, such as Lenin's remark that 'intelligent idealism is closer to intelligent materialism than stupid materialism', or his comment that Hegel 'stretches a hand to materialism' at the end of the *Science of Logic*.⁴⁹ In this sense Bloch's work defends Hegelian idealism more openly than does Lukács's as a major source of Marxist dialectics.

Nevertheless, this is not without ambiguities. Thus, similar to Lukács, Bloch in *Subjekt-Objekt* also praises Lenin's crudely materialist *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* as a great Marxist critique of 'positivism',⁵⁰ seeming not to acknowledge the possibility of a break or even a shift of emphasis between that work and Lenin's Hegel Notebooks. I have found no discussions of Lenin's Hegel Notebooks in Bloch's other writings, except for some passing references in his 1963 Tübingen lectures.⁵¹ There is no mention at all of the Hegel Notebooks in Bloch's 1970 article on the one-hundredth anniversary of Lenin's birth.⁵² As with the other important Central European Hegelian Marxists during this period whom I have taken up, although Bloch was certainly aware of Lenin's Hegel Notebooks, he did not discuss them very much.

Thus, despite the publication of Lenin's Hegel Notebooks in German in 1932 and the interest that Korsch, Lukács, and Bloch had in the Hegel-Marx relationship, these theorists discuss Lenin's relation to Hegel less than one might have expected them to have done. Nonetheless, Lenin's Hegel Notebooks were known to these theorists, and they remained a point of reference, even if in some cases a negative one. The Hegel Notebooks were greeted with more interest, at least in certain quarters, in France and the United States, societies whose intellectual cultures were decidedly more anti-Hegelian but where, during the depression of the 1930s, intellectuals began to turn more seriously than before toward an examination of Marxist theory.

48 Bloch 1962 [1949], p. 425. Bloch also mentions this issue in *The Principle of Hope* (Bloch 1986 [1959]), p. 270.

49 Bloch 1962 [1949], p. 431.

50 Bloch 1962 [1949], p. 109.

51 Bloch 1970b, pp. 78, 154–55, 292–93.

52 Bloch 1970a, pp. 478–83.

3 France in the 1930s: Lefebvre and Guterman

It was in France on the eve of World War II that Lenin's Hegel Notebooks first began to get some serious public discussion by Western Marxists. Henri Lefebvre and Norbert Guterman, two unorthodox members of the French Communist party, wrote a 130-page introduction to a French edition of Lenin's Hegel Notebooks, which appeared in 1938 under the title *Cahiers sur la dialectique de Hegel*, published by the prestigious Paris publishing house Gallimard. Lefebvre, one of the leading French Marxist theorists, is known more for his critique of everyday life and for his writings on alienation, humanism, and the young Marx than for his discussion of Lenin and Hegel. For example, George Lichtheim has written that 'Lefebvre in 1939 was already going against the official line, which in those years was based on the Leninist interpretation of Marxism as a doctrine centered on the analysis of capitalism's political and economic contradictions'.⁵³ In fact, Lefebvre's study of both Marx's 1844 *Manuscripts* and Lenin's Hegel Notebooks in the 1930s was crucial to the more humanistic, Hegelian Marxism that he began to develop. The question was one not of rejecting Lenin but rather of how to view Lenin's work.

Lefebvre's interest in Hegel went back to the 1920s when he, Guterman, and other radical intellectuals were drawn to surrealism and founded the journal *Philosophies*. Years later Lefebvre wrote, 'I began to read Hegel, who led me to Marx', this after the surrealist André Breton had shown him a copy of Hegel's *Science of Logic* in 1924.⁵⁴ Although Hegel was not a topic of very much debate in France until the late 1930s, when Alexandre Kojève began his famous seminar, there were some articles on Hegel published in the venerable *Revue de métaphysique et de morale* in 1931, including an important one by Nikolai Hartmann. The next year the young Georges Bataille entered the debate over Hegel.

53 Lichtheim 1966, p. 88.

54 Lefebvre 1975, p. 49. Martin Jay's chapter 'Lefebvre, the Surrealists, and Hegelian Marxism in France', in Jay 1984, and Alfred Schmidt's essay 'Henri Lefebvre and Contemporary Interpretations of Marx' (Schmidt 1972), should be consulted as good general accounts that place Lefebvre in the context of Western Marxism. A more detailed discussion of Lefebvre is found in Kelly 1982, a study marred by its overly narrow focus on those varieties of Marxism in and around the Communist party. Kelly acknowledges that he has 'deliberately left aside' the various debates in French Marxism 'on humanism and alienation which have nourished many volumes of discussion' (p. 6). See also Kelly's 1981 'Hegel in France to 1940', and Mark Poster's early attempt at a synthesis, Poster 1975. Bud Burkhard's dissertation 'Priests and Jesters: Henri Lefebvre, the Philosophies Gang, and French Marxism between the Wars' (Burkhard 1986b) contains the most detailed and in-depth treatment of Lefebvre in the 1930s.

Hartmann and Bataille each attacked the type of dialectic employed by Hegel from the standpoint of science. Bataille's article is notable for its brief reference to Lenin's 'On the Question of Dialectics', although he was seemingly unaware that this fragment was part of a larger whole.⁵⁵

Lefebvre joined the Communist party in 1928 and remained an unorthodox member until 1958, when he was expelled. During the 1930s he and Guterman introduced the first French translations not only of Lenin's Hegel Notebooks but also of Marx's 'Critique of the Hegelian Dialectic' from the 1844 *Manuscripts*. Marx's critique was published in *Avant-poste*, another journal that they maintained for a brief period.⁵⁶ On the other hand, as in Germany, the party publishing house had rushed Lenin's *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* into print in 1928, making it the first volume of his *Collected Works* to be published in French.⁵⁷ Martin Jay expresses a widely held view of Lefebvre when he writes that

well before his departure from the PCF, however, Lefebvre had fought to open its mind to a more philosophically and less scientistically inclined version of Marxism. And well before the impact on other Marxists of the Hegel Renaissance led by Kojève and Hyppolite, he had taken to heart the lesson he had first learned from Breton, that Hegel was crucial for the understanding of Marx ... As one of the first in France to read and appreciate the importance of the 1844 *Paris Manuscripts*, he was able to see the links between the young Marx and Hegel, in particular the Hegel of the *Phenomenology* rather than the *Logic*.⁵⁸

What is missing here, however, is an appreciation of Lefebvre's work with Lenin's Hegel Notebooks, to which I now turn.

In their 1938 introduction Lefebvre and Guterman write that Lenin's Hegel Notebooks show 'the progress of his thought' since *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*.⁵⁹ This is their first and only reference to any differences between

55 See Hartmann 1931, pp. 285–316; Bataille 1985 [1932].

56 Marx, 'Critique de la dialectique hégélienne', *Avant-poste*, June and August 1933, cited in Kelly 1982, p. 31.

57 Kelly 1982 writes that Lenin's *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* 'rapidly became the standard treatise on the subject' of Marxist philosophy, something that 'tended to divert attention from the rational contribution of Hegel to Marxism, even though, as other works later showed, Lenin himself held Hegel's dialectic in high esteem' (pp. 21–2).

58 Jay 1984, p. 294.

59 Norbert Guterman and Henri Lefebvre, introduction to *Lenine* 1938, p. 52. The introduc-

Lenin's Hegel Notebooks and his earlier writings. Although oblique, it implies that they see the Hegel Notebooks as the higher development of Lenin's concept of dialectic. In fact, their non-discussion of *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*, except in this one brief passage, is rather telling.

The form in which Guterman and Lefebvre published Lenin's Hegel Notebooks is also very significant. First, it was printed by a major literary and philosophical publisher, Gallimard, not a party press. Second, that these notebooks are devoted to the work of Hegel is evident in the title itself, *Cahiers sur la dialectique de Hegel*, thus distinguishing this edition from the Stalinist editions, which downplay Lenin's concern with Hegel by using the more abstract title *Philosophical Notebooks*. Third, unlike in the Stalinist editions, the most important manuscript, Lenin's 'Abstract of Hegel's *Science of Logic*', is presented here by itself in a single volume, not mixed with other writings as in the *Philosophical Notebooks*.⁶⁰ This does not mean that the edition is without its own problems, however. Gallimard insisted that Lenin's comments on Hegel be reproduced not in the margins, as he had written them, but with a system of footnotes, which tends to muddle Lenin's original text.⁶¹

Guterman and Lefebvre begin their introduction by contending that in Lenin's Hegel Notebooks, 'the reader finds himself in the presence of ideas which, taken in all their significance, in the totality of their aims and *interests*, support the comparison with the greatest philosophical works'.⁶² At the same time, they write that 'Lenin was not one of those men for whom action is opposed to thought',⁶³ calling attention to the date of composition of the Hegel Notebooks, in the midst of World War I: 'Lenin reads Hegel at the moment when the unity of the industrial world tears itself apart, when the fragments of this unity, which was thought to have been realised, violently collide with one another: when all of the contradictions unchain themselves. The Hegel-

tion has a dateline of New York, September 1935, indicating some delay by Gallimard in issuing the volume. All translations are my own.

60 An edition of the *Philosophical Notebooks* did not appear in French from the Communist party press, Éditions Sociales, until 1955.

61 Lefebvre himself points to these shortcomings of the Gallimard edition in his *La Pensée de Lenine* (Paris: Bordas, 1957), p. 161. He also writes that the Gallimard edition of Lenin's Hegel Notebooks was received with "almost complete indifference" by the intellectual public and that "very few copies were sold" when it first came off the press in 1939 (although it carried a 1938 date). After May 1940 it was placed on the "Otto" list of forbidden books and seized by the Nazis. Gallimard did not reprint this edition until 1967, by which time it finally did generate a large audience.

62 Guterman and Lefebvre, introduction to *Lenine* 1938, p. 7.

63 Guterman and Lefebvre, introduction to *Lenine* 1938, p. 9.

ian theory of contradiction shows him that the moment when the *solution*, a higher unity, seems to move further away, is sometimes that [moment] when it is approaching'.⁶⁴ They write that the virulent nationalism Lenin faced in 1914 'already anticipates fascist ideology',⁶⁵ linking the Hegel Notebooks to the concrete problems of the 1930s. For Lenin in 1914 and after, 'his vision' drawn from the Hegel Notebooks 'prepares his action'.⁶⁶

Lenin, they claim, neither accepted Hegel uncritically nor rejected him. For Lenin, they write: 'The critical reading [of Hegel] is also a creative act. Lenin judges Hegel with a severity that one could not have except toward oneself – towards one's past, at the moment one surmounts it'.⁶⁷ In this sense Lenin is critically appropriating classical German philosophy for the working class, as Marx and Engels had urged. Furthermore, the Hegel Notebooks shed new light on the problem of how Marxism is to appropriate Hegel. For most Marxists, dialectical method is the only valuable legacy of Hegel, and for them, 'the content of Hegelianism needs to be rejected'.⁶⁸ For some, Hegel's method is the point of departure for a materialist dialectic. For others, Hegel's dialectic becomes materialist through Marxism, which is 'a theory of real forces, their equilibrium and the rupture of this mechanical equilibrium'.⁶⁹

Guterman and Lefebvre contend that for Lenin in the Hegel Notebooks, these issues are 'posed in a much more profound and concrete manner'.⁷⁰ They give as an example Lenin's discussion of the final chapter of Hegel's *Science of Logic*, 'The Absolute Idea': 'Hegelian idealism has an objective aspect. His theory of religion and the state is unacceptable. However, as Lenin remarks, the most idealistic chapter of Hegel's Logic, that on the Absolute Idea, is *at the same time* the most materialist'.⁷¹ Therefore, any 'inversion' of Hegel by Marxists 'cannot be a simple operation'.⁷²

Speaking in terms with some existentialist overtones, Guterman and Lefebvre take issue with Hegel as a 'metaphysician'.⁷³ They also point to three sets of issues in need of discussion. First are those 'problems already elaborated

64 Ibid.

65 Norbert Guterman and Henri Lefebvre, introduction to *Lenine* 1938, pp. 9–10.

66 Norbert Guterman and Henri Lefebvre, introduction to *Lenine* 1938, p. 10.

67 Norbert Guterman and Henri Lefebvre, introduction to *Lenine* 1938, p. 12.

68 Norbert Guterman and Henri Lefebvre, introduction to *Lenine* 1938, pp. 14–15.

69 Norbert Guterman and Henri Lefebvre, introduction to *Lenine* 1938, p. 15.

70 Ibid.

71 Ibid.

72 Norbert Guterman and Henri Lefebvre, introduction to *Lenine* 1938, p. 16.

73 Norbert Guterman and Henri Lefebvre, introduction to *Lenine* 1938, p. 17.

by dialectical materialism,'⁷⁴ including the theory of contradiction, dialectical relativism, and the unity of subject and object as well as of theory and practice. Second come those 'problems on which the founders of Marxism gave precise indications, but which need to be taken up again in light of contemporary philosophical thought'.⁷⁵ These include categories such as consciousness and ideology, praxis, and 'the relation of the individual to the social'.⁷⁶ Third come 'open problems', 'perspectives for the development of dialectical thought',⁷⁷ issues presumably not addressed very much by Marx, Engels, or Lenin. Here one of the key issues mentioned is that of alienation.

From this point on most of their long introduction is taken up with these and other general problems in Hegel's thought and its relevance to Marxism, with only occasional references to Lenin's Hegel Notebooks. Because of this, the Hegel Notebooks unfortunately never get the type of serious and probing discussion that they deserve, even according to Guterman and Lefebvre's own statements at the beginning of their introduction. Instead, Guterman and Lefebvre discuss at some length general concepts within dialectics such as contradiction, totality, and negativity. They also critique non-Marxist Hegelians such as Benedetto Croce for having downplayed the concept of contradiction and contrast the concept of totality both to that of the isolated bourgeois individual and to the way in which 'the fascist state makes a parody out of the actually existing totality'.⁷⁸ On the other hand, Hegel's concept of negativity as 'the principal motor of the dialectical movement' is not, they argue, to be confused with the existentialist concept of 'Nothingness'.⁷⁹

Unlike those Marxists who would reduce dialectic to a theory of knowledge [*gnoséologie*] only, Guterman and Lefebvre hold that Lenin was interested as much in the 'living context'⁸⁰ of Hegel's dialectic as he was in the method alone. Nor can dialectic be reduced to a set of formal laws. They write that after Lenin has made his study of Hegel, 'he insists on certain laws which Hegel has left in the shadows: The law of development in a spiral (in being and in thought). Rapport and interaction of form and content. Unity of theory and practice. Unity of the relative and the absolute, of the finite and the infinite'.⁸¹ In keeping with the aversion to totality so characteristic of French thought

74 Norbert Guterman and Henri Lefebvre, introduction to Lenin 1938, p. 19.

75 Ibid.

76 Ibid.

77 Ibid.

78 Norbert Guterman and Henri Lefebvre, introduction to Lenin 1938, p. 34.

79 Norbert Guterman and Henri Lefebvre, introduction to Lenin 1938, p. 41.

80 Norbert Guterman and Henri Lefebvre, introduction to Lenin 1938, p. 50.

81 Norbert Guterman and Henri Lefebvre, introduction to Lenin 1938, pp. 52–3.

in the twentieth century,⁸² they contrast Hegel's 'closed totality' to the 'open totality' of 'Marx-Lenin'.⁸³ This closed totality is found in the chapter on the absolute idea in the *Science of Logic*, at which point, in their view, 'Hegel hypostasises negativity, as if a mystical force from the depths', casting it down. In this way, having thrown down negativity, in the final chapter Hegel 'mystifies his system'.⁸⁴ Another major flaw in Hegel is that he fetishises reason: 'In pushing rationalism to the absurd, Hegel compromises it'.⁸⁵ Neither the view that Hegel's *Science of Logic* ends in a closed totality where negativity is abandoned nor a critique of Hegel for pushing reason to the absurd can be found in the text of Lenin's Hegel Notebooks. They are, however, key concepts in surrealist thought, possibly carried over by Guterman and Lefebvre from the 1920s.⁸⁶ The previously cited comments are therefore an example of the problematic nature of their introduction, which too often tends to impose their own interpretation of the dialectic on Lenin's text, since at no point do they indicate where their own view differs from Lenin's interpretation of Hegel's *Science of Logic*.

Critiquing Hegel's concept of consciousness, Guterman and Lefebvre refer to Lenin once again: 'Hegel's Logic – as Lenin saw – reattaches consciousness to the movement of the universe, by degree, contradicting in this way the notion of the Hegelian system of a closed subjectivity. Hegel, in a sense, opens up consciousness and reintegrates it into universal interaction. Materialism prolongs and specifies this interaction, reintegrating into daily life concrete human existence'.⁸⁷ Although no textual reference to Lenin's Hegel Notebooks is given to support such a conclusion (and I could not find any), it does have strong overtones of Lefebvre's later writings on the problem of everyday life.

Throughout, Hegel, Marx, and Lenin are contrasted to Heidegger and Nietzsche. This is an effort to make Lenin and Hegel actual for the philosophical debates of the 1930s. Guterman and Lefebvre write: 'To Nietzsche's formula "Man must be surpassed", Marxism responds: "Man is the one who sur-

82 For a general discussion of this issue, see Jay 1984.

83 Norbert Guterman and Henri Lefebvre, introduction to Lenin 1938, pp. 54–5.

84 Norbert Guterman and Henri Lefebvre, introduction to Lenin 1938, p. 59.

85 Norbert Guterman and Henri Lefebvre, introduction to Lenin 1938, p. 65.

86 Interestingly, a somewhat similar notion of the 'idea of Reason itself as the undialectical element in Hegel's philosophy' appears in Marcuse's 1960 preface to Marcuse 1960, p. xii, a preface written after his lengthy visit to France in 1959. In the same passage of his 1960 preface Marcuse looks to 'poetic language', including that of 'surrealism', to overcome what he now (unlike in 1941, when the book first appeared) sees as a major limitation in Hegel's thought.

87 Norbert Guterman and Henri Lefebvre, introduction to Lenin 1938, p. 79.

passes”.⁸⁸ This strong affirmation of Marxism as a humanism is preceded by an attack on the ‘line of irrationalist idealism, from Kierkegaard to Heidegger’.⁸⁹ They defend the Hegelian-Marxian notion of a social individual versus both liberalism and fascism, the latter of ‘which poses the nation and the collectivity as absolute, exterior and superior values, before which the individual must stand aside’.⁹⁰

An entire section of their introduction is devoted to the category of practice. Much as Lenin did, Guterman and Lefebvre connect practice to ‘the interaction of man and nature’.⁹¹ Again following Lenin, they emphasise Hegel’s section on the idea of the good just before the concluding chapter of the *Science of Logic*, a section where, as we have seen in the discussion on Lukács, Hegel greatly stresses action and the practical idea. Guterman and Lefebvre’s view is a bit different here from that of Lukács, however, since they emphasise the moment of utopianism within both Hegel’s text and the philosophical tradition: ‘The Idea of the Good was the non-revolutionary form, parallel to utopianism, of [human] aspirations and demands ... These aspirations are transposed, or sublimated themselves, alienate themselves in mystical forms (religion, magic, mysticism)’.⁹² They conclude that the materialist dialectic, following as it does after Hegel, ‘unites the real and the possible’.⁹³

A final section of their introduction is devoted to the concept of alienation, a category found in Marx’s 1844 *Manuscripts* but not in Lenin’s Hegel Notebooks. For Hegel, they hold, the development of the idea is a process of various stages of alienation. Only Marx shows how a ‘larger and more effective’ concept of reason results from a critique of Hegel’s concept of alienation. Ludwig Feuerbach’s error was to repudiate not only ‘Hegelian idealism’ but also ‘the dialectic’,⁹⁴ whereas Marx held onto the dialectic. They sum up the whole introduction by discussing the Hegelian idea in a ‘materialist sense’.⁹⁵ Besides the categories that one would expect in a Hegelian Marxism – self-movement of humanity and nature, unity of finite and infinite and of human being and nature, the total human being, the bringing down to earth of what the human spirit and religions had yearned for – there is also a quotation from

88 Norbert Guterman and Henri Lefebvre, introduction to Lenin 1938, p. 85.

89 Norbert Guterman and Henri Lefebvre, introduction to Lenin 1938, p. 75.

90 Norbert Guterman and Henri Lefebvre, introduction to Lenin 1938, p. 89.

91 Norbert Guterman and Henri Lefebvre, introduction to Lenin 1938, p. 97.

92 Norbert Guterman and Henri Lefebvre, introduction to Lenin 1938, p. 103.

93 Norbert Guterman and Henri Lefebvre, introduction to Lenin 1938, p. 105.

94 Norbert Guterman and Henri Lefebvre, introduction to Lenin 1938, p. 128.

95 Norbert Guterman and Henri Lefebvre, introduction to Lenin 1938, p. 134.

the nineteenth-century symbolist poet Arthur Rimbaud on the unity of 'body and soul'⁹⁶ giving once again a flavour of their surrealism of the 1920s.

Thus, far from being a close textual analysis of Lenin's Hegel Notebooks, this French edition of the notebooks was for Guterman and Lefebvre the occasion for a broad statement on Hegelian Marxism. A focus on the fluid, self-developing character of Hegel's dialectic is what stands out in their account, albeit with some overtones of both surrealism and existentialism, which are hardly to be found in Lenin's text. A more serious problem is their sharp critique of Hegel's concept of totality in the chapter on the absolute idea, which puts a certain distance between Hegelian and Marxist thought, a separation that is not found in Lenin's Hegel Notebooks, at least not on this particular issue. In this way, as it was with Lukács, it is two Western Hegelian Marxists who are surprisingly anxious to put a greater distance between themselves and Hegel's idealism than did Lenin in his own Hegel Notebooks.

The best-known result of Lefebvre's grappling in the 1930s with Marx's *1844 Manuscripts* and Lenin's Hegel Notebooks is the book he published in 1939, *Dialectical Materialism*. Although this book never mentions Lenin's Hegel Notebooks, much of the type of Hegelian Marxism developed in Guterman and Lefebvre's introduction to them is carried over into *Dialectical Materialism*. As did Lenin in the Hegel Notebooks, Lefebvre here stresses that in the *Science of Logic* Hegel 'saw the absolute Idea as a unity of practice and knowledge, of the creative activity and thought'.⁹⁷ Lefebvre adds, however, that unfortunately 'Hegel did not elucidate action in itself'⁹⁸ and that in the *Science of Logic* 'Hegel's system ... abolishes both contradiction and Becoming' in the end.⁹⁹ Other themes flow more directly from Marx's *1844 Manuscripts* and its focus on Hegel's *Phenomenology*, while on the other hand, Lefebvre seems almost to reject the *Science of Logic*, based on Marx's characterisation of Hegel's logic as the 'money of the spirit'. In this sense Lefebvre's reading of Hegel is somewhat different from that of Lenin. In addition, Lefebvre expresses great reservations about Hegel's central category, the negation of the negation, something that Stalinist philosophers have attacked incessantly, as have the Althusserians in the more recent period.

Still other passages of *Dialectical Materialism* show the markedly Hegelian character of Lefebvre's Marxism, as for example when he describes Marx's his-

96 Norbert Guterman and Henri Lefebvre, introduction to *Lenine* 1938, pp. 134–5.

97 Lefebvre 1968 [1939], pp. 50–1.

98 Lefebvre 1968 [1939], pp. 50–1.

99 Lefebvre 1968 [1939], p. 57.

torical materialism as 'the unity of idealism and materialism'.¹⁰⁰ Lefebvre further suggests that Hegel's *Science of Logic* was 'rehabilitated' by Marx in 1858, after having been previously rejected by him from 1844 on, as Marx worked on the *Critique of Political Economy* and *Capital* and wrote his well-known letter to Engels on having glanced through Hegel's *Logic*.¹⁰¹ The last half of the book exhibits a fairly obvious existentialist bent, as when Lefebvre, unlike many other interpreters, such as Marcuse,¹⁰² stresses that the relation of nature to the human being is one of 'fatality or brute chance',¹⁰³ at least in the preindustrial world.

Unfortunately, even though the political situation facing Lefebvre in France did permit both the publication and discussion of Lenin's Hegel Notebooks, as well as the elaboration of a Hegelian Marxism, the latter based in part on the notebooks, as seen in *Dialectical Materialism*, the years of their publication, 1938 and 1939, were hardly ones permitting a very wide discussion. The Nazi occupation soon drove underground both Marxism generally and Lefebvre personally.¹⁰⁴ The discussion begun in 1938 on Hegelian Marxism, including the one on Lenin and Hegel, could and did emerge with a new urgency only in the postwar period.

100 Lefebvre 1968 [1939], p. 72.

101 On this issue and Marx's post-1858 notes on Hegel see especially O'Malley and Schrader 1977. See also Rubel's comment in a note to his edition of Marx 1982, pp. 1358–9.

102 See Marcuse's chapter 'Nature and Revolution' in Marcuse 1972, where he argues: 'The subversive potential of the sensibility, and nature as a field of liberation are central themes in Marx's *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*' (p. 63).

103 Lefebvre 1968 [1939], p. 137.

104 In his dissertation 'Priests and Jesters' Burkhard suggests that Guterman and Lefebvre 1936 was the most important result of Lefebvre's work in Hegelian Marxism in the 1930s. One reason that *Dialectical Materialism* makes no reference to Lenin may lie in the date of publication, late in the year 1939, after the French Communist party had been banned by the government because of its support for the notorious Hitler-Stalin Pact and the invasion and dismemberment of Poland by Germany and the Soviet Union, which followed in the autumn of 1939. In *Modern French Marxism* Kelly writes that the 'prohibition of his party was a major reason why Lefebvre systematically omitted any specific reference to communism' (Kelly 1982, p. 49) in *Dialectical Materialism*, fearing that only a scholarly, non-political book could be published under the circumstances. This period also shows the limits of Lefebvre as a critical Marxist: while many others, including leading Communist intellectuals, such as Jean-Paul Sartre's friend Paul Nizan, left the party in protest against the Hitler-Stalin Pact, Lefebvre remained a member. He did not in fact express any major political disagreements, against either the pact or the Moscow trials of the 1930s.

4 France, 1944–53

The first substantial discussion of Lenin and Hegel in postwar France was again by Lefebvre, in his book *Logique formelle, logique dialectique* (1947), issued by the official Communist party publishing house. Originally conceived, according to the author, as part of an eight-volume ‘treatise on dialectical materialism’, this project was never completed. Lefebvre wrote that the volume was based mainly on lecture notes for courses from the early 1930s.¹⁰⁵ Lefebvre discusses Lenin and Hegel not in the main text but in a lengthy appendix.¹⁰⁶

The appendix begins with the well-known quotation from Lenin’s Hegel Notebooks: ‘Aphorism: It is impossible fully to grasp Marx’s *Capital*, and especially its first chapter, if you have not studied through and understood the whole of Hegel’s *Logic*. Consequently, none of the Marxists for the past ½ century have understood Marx!’.¹⁰⁷ Lefebvre argues that ‘this remark by Lenin is especially directed against Plekhanov’,¹⁰⁸ whom Lenin in the same part of his notebooks accuses of having criticised idealist philosophers ‘from a vulgar materialist point of view rather than a dialectical materialist one’.¹⁰⁹ Lefebvre also called attention to Lenin’s 1922 speech recommending the direct study of Hegel, calling it ‘Lenin’s philosophical testament’.¹¹⁰

In this book Lefebvre also makes limited use of Lenin’s earlier *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*, viewing the Hegel Notebooks as both a break and a continuity with that early work.¹¹¹ Other writers, such as Dunayevskaya, have seen it as a break with Lenin’s earlier writings, holding that Lenin intended the critique of vulgar materialism to apply not only to Plekhanov but also to his own early *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*.¹¹² Nonetheless, the central thrust of Lefebvre’s argument here is for a critical recovery by Marxists of Hegel’s dialectic:

105 Lefebvre 1959, p. 449.

106 Lefebvre 1969 [1947]. The appendix in question, which includes the discussion of Lenin’s Hegel Notebooks, constitutes pp. 227–284 of Lefebvre’s book. Translations are my own.

107 *cw* 38:180.

108 Lefebvre 1969 [1947], p. 227.

109 *Ibid.*

110 Lefebvre 1969 [1947], p. 228.

111 Lefebvre 1969 [1947], p. 231.

112 Dunayevskaya introduces this notion in her *Marxism and Freedom*. Quoting the same passage as does Lefebvre, she writes: ‘With himself, he [Lenin] is as merciless, giving no quarter, even in the economic field’ (Dunayevskaya 1988 [1958], p. 171).

These citations suffice to show the great and profound character of dialectical materialism. Without ceasing to judge philosophical idealism (therefore without falling into an eclecticism, without mixing together idealism and materialism), it rehabilitates, in a sense, this idealism. ... Dialectical materialism absorbs idealism insofar as the latter involves a content. Objective idealism tends toward a thorough-going materialism. Dialectical materialism does not oppose one systematic doctrine to another. Resulting from the unity of objective idealism and a thorough-going materialism, it goes beyond any unilaterality.¹¹³

Here Lefebvre stops short of the standpoint central to Marx's 1844 *Manuscripts* of a 'naturalism or humanism' that 'distinguishes itself both from Idealism and Materialism, and is, at the same time, the truth uniting both',¹¹⁴ a standpoint to which he had seemed closer in his *Dialectical Materialism*.

Lefebvre also takes up the writings of Hegel, Engels, and Lenin on the finite and the infinite and on understanding and reason. He singles out Lenin's discussion of transition from logic to nature at the end of Hegel's *Science of Logic*, quoting Lenin's Hegel Notebooks as follows: 'This phrase is very remarkable. Transition from the logical idea to Nature. Stretching a hand to materialism. Engels was right: Hegel's system is a materialism turned upside down'.¹¹⁵ Following Lenin's argument in the notebooks, Lefebvre connects nature not only to materialism but also to practice, especially to 'social practice': 'It is essential to note – and Lenin insists strongly on this point – that practice and the concept are thus degrees, moments of thought, which then recognise and rationally legitimate dialectical method'.¹¹⁶ This element, practice, as we have seen, also drew much attention from Lukács.

As part of a philosophical debate in the 1940s between existentialism and Marxism, Lefebvre occasionally mentions what he considers to be points of difference between these two perspectives. The first point that he brings up in this regard is Hegel's concept of identity: 'the principle of identity is *necessary* to the progression of the categories ... This is why Hegel, even though abstractly, has shown that contradictory concepts are the aspects of a "higher" unity. Without this rationality, the Hegelian dialectic falls back to the irrational level of a pseudo-dialectic and becomes, as with Heidegger, a metaphysics of

113 Lefebvre 1969 [1947], p. 236.

114 Marx 1958a, p. 313.

115 Lefebvre 1969 [1947], p. 258.

116 Lefebvre 1969 [1947], p. 258.

being and nothingness'.¹¹⁷ Although Heidegger is the one actually named, a reference to Jean-Paul Sartre's *Being and Nothingness* (1943) is strongly suggested.¹¹⁸ At a later point in his appendix, Lefebvre brings Lenin's Hegel Notebooks directly into the debate: 'Notice how Lenin, as a great realist, leaves aside the disillusioning [*désabusés*] and strongly "existentialist" reflections by Hegel on "sorrow and finitude" in the *Logic*.'¹¹⁹

As to the relative importance of the three books that form Hegel's *Science of Logic* – 'The Doctrine of Being', 'The Doctrine of Essence', and 'The Doctrine of the Notion' – Lefebvre quotes Engels: 'That the detail of his [Hegel's] philosophy of nature is full of nonsense I will of course gladly grant you, but his *real* philosophy of nature is to be found in the second part of the *Logic*, in the theory of Essence, the true core of the whole doctrine. The modern scientific theory of the interaction of natural forces is, however, only another expression or rather the positive proof of Hegel's argument about cause and effect'.¹²⁰ Lefebvre seems to follow Engels's lead in giving great stress to the book on essence in both the applicability of Hegel's *Science of Logic* to Marxism and in his view of its importance within Lenin's Hegel Notebooks. As I will show later when I discuss the debates among Raya Dunayevskaya, C.L.R. James, and Grace Lee on this issue in the United States during the 1940s, this procedure is questionable, given that Lenin devoted more space in the notebooks to Hegel's doctrine of the notion than to essence. Here Lefebvre ignores what he himself quoted earlier from Lenin's treatment of the doctrine of notion in the *Science of Logic*, where Lenin was surprised to find that the concluding chapter on the absolute idea contains 'the least idealism' and is devoted instead to 'dialectical method'.¹²¹ In fact, far from this leading Lefebvre into the final sections of the *Science of Logic*, he remains very hostile to what he considers to be Hegel's concept of 'the eternal and the absolute'.¹²²

Much of Lefebvre's appendix is taken up with long quotations on dialectics from Hegel, Engels, and Lenin, and occasionally from Marx. These quotations often follow each other directly in the text, with only footnotes indicating the source. This form of presentation stresses the commonality of dialectical logic in Hegel and in the Marxist tradition. The appendix ends on a rather pedes-

117 Lefebvre 1969 [1947], p. 245.

118 In fact, Lefebvre's sharply critical 1946 book, *L'Existentialisme*, was published even before *Logique formelle, logique dialectique*.

119 Lefebvre 1969 [1947], p. 279.

120 Lefebvre 1969 [1947], p. 280.

121 Lefebvre 1969 [1947], p. 234.

122 Lefebvre 1969 [1947], p. 247.

trian note, returning to the scientistic materialism of Engels: 'Engels formulated *three* dialectical laws: transformation of quantity into quality, and reciprocally – interpenetration of opposites – negation of the negation'.¹²³ The doors to a newer view of Marxism's relation to Hegel that had been opened now seem to close, as the reader is returned to a far narrower concept of dialectic, already well known to official dialectical materialism. The sense of doors closing becomes even stronger when Lefebvre then quotes approvingly Stalin's 'fourth' dialectical principle, 'universal interdependence'.¹²⁴ The doors appear to open slightly again when Lefebvre concludes that since Stalin had added a fourth law of dialectics, 'these differences show that the question of dialectical laws remains an open question'.¹²⁵ Lefebvre adds provisionally a fifth law of dialectics, that of 'development in a spiral'.¹²⁶ In the end, however, no real contrast has been drawn to Engels's or even Stalin's mechanistic concepts of dialectics. With the five dialectical laws of Engels, Stalin, and Lefebvre, the reader is left wondering why it is necessary to return to Hegel directly at all, or even to Lenin's Hegel Notebooks.

A second major difficulty with this discussion by Lefebvre is its placement in his book as an appendix. This tends to make the detailed discussion of texts directly on dialectics in Hegel, Engels, and Lenin seem to be only a technical one, for the specialist rather than for the general reader, especially since no discussion of Lenin's Hegel Notebooks occurs in the main text. Whether intentional or not, this form of presentation did not evoke much discussion among those intellectuals – existentialists, dissident Marxists, and leftist Catholics – who were at that very moment debating the significance of Marx's *1844 Manuscripts* so hotly.

The fact that Lenin's Hegel Notebooks were here tied so closely to Engels (and even to Stalin!) on dialectics helped, however accidentally, to cover over their new and creative elements. The tone of the presentation here is different from that of Guterman and Lefebvre's 1938 introduction to their edition of Lenin's Hegel Notebooks. In 1938 there was, as we saw, a real sense of novelty, of discovery, of creativity. Critiques of established Marxism were strongly stated or at least suggested from a reading of Lenin's Hegel Notebooks. That element of self-critique of established Marxism is almost entirely missing in Lefebvre's 1947 text, despite its more detailed treatment of the Hegel Notebooks. This

123 Lefebvre 1969 [1947], p. 283.

124 Ibid.

125 Lefebvre 1969 [1947], p. 284.

126 Ibid.

problem was accentuated by the fact that the 1938 edition of the notebooks had been destroyed during the occupation and was not reprinted until 1967.

Nonetheless, there were enough new elements in Lefebvre's *Logique formelle, logique dialectique* to subject him to furious attacks from other Communists for 'idealism'.¹²⁷ Despite his many concessions to the official version of dialectical materialism, there were still, for example, only a few references to Lenin's *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*. With regard to Lenin and Hegel in France, by this time even Lukács was of very little assistance to opening a serious debate. The concluding chapter of Lukács's polemical *Existentialisme ou Marxisme?* published in French in 1948, one year after Lefebvre's *Logique formelle, logique dialectique*, was entitled 'The Leninist Theory of Cognition and the Problems of Modern Philosophy'. Here Lukács calls Lenin's *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* his 'principal philosophical work', one that he embraces uncritically because of 'the preponderant place it gives to philosophical materialism' in 'the imperialist epoch'.¹²⁸ Throughout this book Lukács refers frequently to *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*, with only occasional, almost covert, references to Lenin's Hegel Notebooks.

By 1949, in an essay of 'self-criticism' published in the party journal *La Nouvelle Critique*, Lefebvre retreats still further from Hegel, taking back, for example, his earlier statements on the 'rehabilitation' of idealism by dialectical materialism in both *Dialectical Materialism* and *Logique formelle, logique dialectique*. In this article not only Stalin but even Stalin's chief ideologue, Andrei Zhdanov, is quoted as an authority on the Hegel-Marx relationship. Zhdanov's infamous statement that 'the question of Hegel was settled long ago' is essentially supported by Lefebvre, although he does timidly advance the notion that 'it seems difficult to understand and assimilate Marx's dialectic without having studied, understood, and assimilated the Hegelian dialectic'.¹²⁹ Backing away once again from Hegel, however, he writes that the main danger is one of 'overestimation of the Hegelian dialectic'. This rather sad eighteen-page essay ends by attacking Marxist humanism as a possible diversion away from Marxism toward liberalism and by applauding the discussions, then taking place in Stalin's Russia, both on Stalin's concept of genetics and on socialist realism in art.

127 Kelly 1982 sums up these attacks in a manner unsympathetic to Lefebvre. Kelly holds that in this period Lefebvre 'moved inexorably from Marxism to neo-Hegelianism' (Kelly 1982, p. 68).

128 Lukács 1948, p 253.

129 Lefebvre 1949, p. 51.

The same period, 1945–50, also saw the rise of a Left Hegelianism in France, as seen to some degree in the writings of Sartre and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, but most importantly in those of Alexandre Kojève and Jean Hyppolite. Whereas Kojève popularised Hegel's *Phenomenology* in his famous 1930s lectures, which were published in book form in 1947, it was Hyppolite who made the greatest contribution, first translating the *Phenomenology* and then writing the major French commentary on it, both in 1946.¹³⁰ Hyppolite also wrote a probing and largely favourable review of Lukács's *Young Hegel* in 1951.¹³¹ Lenin's Hegel Notebooks were certainly known to all these writers. John Heckman, the translator for the English edition of Hyppolite's major work, *Genesis and Structure of Hegel's Phenomenology*, writes in his introduction: 'The fact that Lenin had spent six months in the midst of World War I reading Hegel could not but modify the Stalinist image of him then being put forward. In addition the obvious importance Lenin accorded Hegel not only went against the Stalinist image, but was also in tune with the philosophical preoccupations of many non-Marxists'.¹³² In 1948, in an essay on Marx, Hyppolite wrote: 'Any reading of *Capital* is sufficient to convince one of the influence of Hegel's *Logic*. One realises – as Lenin observed – that one must master the *Logic* to follow Marx's exposition and arguments'.¹³³

5 The United States, 1941–53: From Marcuse to the Johnson-Forest Tendency

Lenin's relation to Hegel was raised also in the United States during the 1940s, first by Frankfurt School member Herbert Marcuse, who was then living in New York. The discussion was hampered by a thirty-year gap between the appearance in English of *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*, first published in 1927, and the Hegel Notebooks, not published until 1958. The first English-language

130 Kojève 1969 [1947]; Hyppolite 1974 [1946]. Roth 1988 offers the most detailed scholarly treatment in English of Kojève and Hyppolite on Hegel. Roth approaches the subject of Hegel and humanism rather defensively, writing in his preface that whereas some might find that his work 'suffers from a nostalgia for the humanism that deconstruction has made "dépassé"', his study 'contains no implicit humanist agenda that would entail a return to earlier notions of the subject' (p. xiii).

131 Included in Hyppolite 1969, but this particular essay first appeared in a French journal in 1951.

132 John Heckman, introduction to Hyppolite 1974, pp. xxi–xxii.

133 Hyppolite, "On the Structure and Philosophical Presuppositions of Marx's *Capital*," in Hyppolite 1969, pp. 128–9. This article originally appeared in a French journal in 1948.

edition of *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* had listed the subsequently prominent philosopher Sidney Hook as the co-translator.¹³⁴

Although not addressing Lenin's Hegel Notebooks directly, in *Reason and Revolution* (1941) Marcuse does suggest that 'Lenin insisted on dialectical method to such an extent that he considered it the hallmark of revolutionary Marxism', drawing a contrast between Lenin's Marxism and the mechanistic materialism of Trotsky and Bukharin.¹³⁵ Marcuse also contrasts Lenin's preoccupation with dialectical methodology to the reformist socialist Eduard Bernstein's rejection of the 'snare' of the dialectic in favour of what Marcuse terms 'the revival of common sense as the organon of knowledge' and to Karl Kautsky's 'revisionist' Marxism, which, writes Marcuse, was 'tested by the standards of positivist sociology and transformed into natural science'.¹³⁶ Marcuse's brief discussion of Lenin on dialectics takes up not the Hegel Notebooks but rather the other, shorter texts Lenin wrote in the 1920s. Later on, in his *Soviet Marxism* (1958), Marcuse avoids any discussion of Lenin and Hegel, concentrating instead on Soviet Marxism in the Stalin and post-Stalin period.¹³⁷

Marcuse's *Reason and Revolution* was the first Hegelian Marxist book published in English, and it was also the first to discuss seriously Marx's 1844 *Manuscripts*.¹³⁸ It received a warm response from some of the leaders of the Johnson-Forest Tendency, a dissident minority grouping inside the American Trotskyist movement whose theorists produced some innovative social and political theory. This grouping, sometimes also referred to as the State Capitalist Tendency, drew its name from the pen names of its two main theorists,

¹³⁴ See Lenin 1927a, vol. 13 of a never-completed version of his *Collected Works*. This volume was the same as the German edition, also published in 1927, and thus included Deborin's preface, Nevsky's appendix, and Lenin's 1915 essay fragment 'On the Question of Dialectics'. This additional material and all reference to Sidney Hook's role were dropped in later editions. At the time of publication a two-part article by Hook on Lenin's book appeared in a leading journal. See Hook 1928, pp. 113–24, 141–55. Although Hook is somewhat critical of Lenin's book, his criticisms are not centred on Hegel, since Hook in the same article takes a vehemently anti-Hegelian position, writing that the year 1844 was when Marx rejected Hegel 'once and for all' (p. 116).

¹³⁵ Marcuse 1960, p. 401.

¹³⁶ Marcuse 1960, pp. 399–400. I have not been able to locate any other discussion of Lenin and Hegel during this period by members of the Frankfurt School. None is mentioned in Wiggershaus 1986. Given the interest of the members of the Frankfurt School in Hegel and Marx, this relative silence on Lenin's Hegel Notebooks is itself interesting.

¹³⁷ Marcuse 1958. Marcuse's failure to discuss Lenin's Hegel Notebooks was not apparently due to a dismissively critical attitude toward official Soviet Marxism. Many commentators have expressed surprise at Marcuse's relatively uncritical stance in this book. See, for example, Douglas Kellner's introduction to the 1985 Columbia reprint of *Soviet Marxism*.

¹³⁸ For background on its reception in the 1940s, see Anderson 1993, pp. 243–67.

the Trinidad-born historian and culture critic C.L.R. James (who wrote under the name J.R. Johnson) and the Russian-born economist and former secretary to Trotsky, Raya Dunayevskaya (who wrote under the name Freddie Forest). A third important theorist in the group was the Chinese-American philosopher Grace Lee (Boggs).

Years later, in a 1979 memorial article written just after Marcuse's death, Dunayevskaya recounted some of their early enthusiasm for Marcuse's book: 'In that seminal work, Marcuse established the Humanism of Marxism, and re-established the revolutionary dialectic of Hegel-Marx, for the first time for the American public. It is impossible to forget the indebtedness we felt for Marcuse when that breath of fresh air and vision of a truly classless society was published'.¹³⁹ During the 1940s Dunayevskaya, James, and Lee did important theoretical work in several areas: (1) They developed a concept of Stalin's Russia as a totalitarian state capitalist society and opposed World War II from a Left Marxist perspective.¹⁴⁰ (2) They critiqued the emergent labour bureaucracy and wrote on shop-floor revolts of rank-and-file labor as examples of worker creativity. (3) At the same time, they made some important contributions to conceptualising the crucial place of the Black revolt in the U.S. radical movement. (4) They were also among the first in the United States to discuss Marx's *1844 Manuscripts*, Marx's debt to Hegel, and, most important for our purposes, Lenin's Hegel Notebooks.

For the most part, even the often celebrated and left-oriented 'New York intellectuals' of the 1940s were usually uninterested in or even downright hostile toward Hegelian thought, let alone to Lenin's Hegel Notebooks.¹⁴¹ This limited the impact of both Marcuse's work and that of the Johnson-Forest

139 Dunayevskaya 1979, p. 11.

140 Many of their writings on this topic from 1941 on can be found in Dunayevskaya 1992; James, Dunayevskaya and Lee 1986 [1950]. See also the *Raya Dunayevskaya Collection*. There was a lively debate over the nature of the Soviet Union among leftist intellectuals in this period, and other, somewhat different, theories of state capitalism were elucidated by the Frankfurt School economist Frederick Pollock in 1941 and the British Trotskyist Tony Cliff in 1948. See Pollock 1989 [1941], pp. 95–118, and Cliff 1988 [1948].

141 For a general sketch, see Wald 1987. Wald points to the extreme antipathy toward Hegel of two of the leading radical intellectuals of the period, Max Eastman and Edmund Wilson. Wald writes that for Wilson, 'Hegel's dialectics was ... a vehicle for bewilderment and oversimplification' (Wald 1987, p. 160). One partial exception to this attitude was the early Trotskyist theoretician Rubin Gotesky, whose 1934–5 critiques of Hook's *Towards the Understanding of Karl Marx*, although not referring directly to Hegel, included a defence of the importance of 'consciousness' and 'human action' for Marxism. See the first part of Gotesky's 'Marxism: Science or Method?' (Goetsky 1934, p. 150), as well as parts two and three in Goetsky 1935a, pp. 71–3, and Goetsky 1935b, pp. 106–9.

Tendency. For example, Sidney Hook, then still a Marxist, wrote two stinging attacks on Marcuse's *Reason and Revolution* when it appeared in 1941. In a review in *The New Republic* Hook expresses particular hostility to Marcuse's use of Hegelian dialectics to critique the positivist sociology of Auguste Comte. Defending positivism, Hook writes that it 'seeks to discover by scientific, not dialectical, methods what the facts are'.¹⁴² In a second, equally hostile review, Hook terms Marcuse's book a 'tendentious apologetic' for Hegel's thought.¹⁴³ A somewhat similar attitude is found in some retrospective remarks by Daniel Bell, who did not become a prominent New York intellectual until the 1950s. Bell ridicules Dunayevskaya for supposedly making 'a major theoretical effort to convince workers that a knowledge of Hegel's *Science of Logic* was necessary to understand Lenin'. In a rather revealing attempt at humour that indicates how unusual the Johnson-Forest Tendency theorists – a Black man and two women – must have appeared to the New York intellectuals of the period, Bell attempts to disparage James's theoretical work by describing him as an 'acknowledged authority ... on cricket' and also ridicules that of Dunayevskaya by describing her as 'matriarchal'.¹⁴⁴

Bell's remark – itself rather tendentious – about convincing workers of the need to study Hegel does hint at an important and unique aspect of the Johnson-Forest Tendency. Unlike Marcuse, who soon went to work for the State Department, its members constituted a leftist revolutionary 'tendency' – although not a party, since they tended to reject traditional vanguardist as well as social democratic forms of the party. Dunayevskaya, James, and Lee viewed Lenin's Hegel Notebooks as one of the most important texts in Marxist philosophy and used it as part of a broad project of rethinking not only Marxist philosophy but also Marxist economics, politics, and even the concept of organisation. By 1947 Lee had translated parts of Marx's *1844 Manuscripts*,¹⁴⁵ Dunayevskaya had translated parts of Lenin's Hegel Notebooks, and all three theorists had begun to study Hegel intensively.

The first product of this effort was James's book-length manuscript, published in mimeographed form in 1948, *Notes on Dialectics*.¹⁴⁶ James's book has a very informal structure, centring generally on a chapter-by-chapter discussion

¹⁴² Hook 1941a, p. 91.

¹⁴³ Hook 1941b, p. 595.

¹⁴⁴ Bell 1973, p. 91.

¹⁴⁵ One interesting product of their discussions of the young Marx, which centred on the concept of alienation, was the pamphlet *The American Worker* (Romano and Stone 1972 [1947]), co-authored by a worker member of the Johnson-Forest Tendency, Paul Romano, and Ria Stone (Grace Lee).

¹⁴⁶ James 1980 [1948].

of Hegel's *Science of Logic*, but with frequent asides to Marx, Lenin, Trotsky, the French and the Russian revolutions, and the contemporary political scene. On Marx's relation to Hegel, James writes: 'If it is possible to say of Marxism that it is the most idealistic of materialisms, it is equally true of Hegel's dialectic that it is the most materialistic of idealisms'.¹⁴⁷ James begins his book with a long quotation from Lenin's 1915 essay fragment 'On the Question of Dialectics', quoting as well Lenin's aphorism in the Hegel Notebooks: 'It is impossible completely to understand Marx's *Capital*, and especially its first chapter, without having thoroughly studied and understood *the whole* of Hegel's *Logic*'.¹⁴⁸ James writes that Lenin's Hegel Notebooks were written during a period when 'Lenin in 1914 found himself in Zurich, with the world that he had known and his categories breaking to pieces. ... He made notes on the *Logic*. ... Sidney Hook once told me there wasn't much to them. Quite right. For *him*, there wasn't much'.¹⁴⁹ This, writes James, is because Hook was an 'academician', but 'there is plenty for us', he concludes.¹⁵⁰

In his treatment of Lenin in *Notes on Dialectics*, James focusses on his discussion of Hegel's concept of leaps or breaks in gradual, evolutionary change. James connects this to Lenin's 1914–15 revolutionary slogan 'turn the imperialist war into a civil war'.¹⁵¹ To James, the notions not only of leaps but also of 'spontaneous activity and self-movement'¹⁵² are key concepts to be drawn from Lenin's Hegel Notebooks. James draws philosophical, political, and organisational conclusions from this: 'You know nothing about organisation unless at every step you relate it to its opposite, spontaneity'.¹⁵³ Furthermore, he writes, 'the task is to abolish organisation', or at least organisation 'as we have known it', and to develop the 'free creative activity of the proletariat'.¹⁵⁴

How is this spontaneist concept to be squared with Lenin's concept of the vanguard party? To James, Lenin's 1917 embrace of the soviets, and above all, his book *State and Revolution*, showed a break in Lenin's thought on the issue

147 James 1980 [1948], p. 171.

148 James 1980 [1948], p. 8.

149 James 1980 [1948], p. 99.

150 Ibid. James seems to imply that Hook was rejecting Lenin's Hegel Notebooks because he was an academic Marxist uninterested in Lenin. This does not explain Hook's earlier interest in Lenin's scientific materialist work *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*, on which, as I mentioned previously, he wrote at some length shortly after it appeared in English.

151 James 1980 [1948], p. 100.

152 James 1980 [1948], p. 101.

153 James 1980 [1948], p. 115.

154 James 1980 [1948], p. 117.

of organisation and spontaneity, at least in part based on Lenin's study of Hegel in 1914–15.¹⁵⁵ In his spontaneist reading of Lenin and Hegel, James terms the traditional Leninist concept of the party a 'noose around our throats'.¹⁵⁶ By focussing on the issue of vanguardism and bureaucracy versus the spontaneity of mass workers movements, James made Lenin and Hegel a concrete issue for Marxist theory and practice. At the same time, however, this approach left many other issues hanging. Having written an eclectic but interesting analysis, James never took it much further, either on Hegel or on Lenin. The task of developing these concepts with greater theoretic rigour fell to the two other theorists of the Johnson-Forest Tendency, especially Dunayevskaya.

In February and March 1949 Dunayevskaya made the first complete English translation from the Russian of the greater part of Lenin's Hegel Notebooks, both the lengthy 'Abstract of Hegel's *Science of Logic*' and the much shorter notes on Hegel's *History of Philosophy*.¹⁵⁷ During that year Dunayevskaya also wrote a series of analyses of Lenin and Hegel as part of an extensive three-way correspondence on dialectics between herself, James, and Lee.¹⁵⁸ Although most of the letters were addressed to a particular individual, all of them appear to have been shared and studied by all three. They are very rich in content and constitute drafts for a joint book on dialectics that was never completed because of theoretical disagreements.

Dunayevskaya's first letter analysing Lenin's Hegel Notebooks accompanied her translation of the first part of Lenin's 'Abstract of Hegel's *Science of Logic*',

155 James 1980 [1948], pp. 138–9.

156 James 1980 [1948], p. 223.

157 The original typescript is held by the Raya Dunayevskaya Collection, Wayne State University, Detroit, Mich. The material is available on microfilm, Dunayevskaya 1981–9, pp. 1492–1584.

158 In the text that follows, the letters will be referred to by author, addressee, and date. All the letters referred to in this manner are held by the Raya Dunayevskaya Collection, pp. 1595–1734, 9209–9237. The letters, usually typed single spaced with narrow margins, constitute a book-length dialogue on the dialectic. According to Michael Flug, archivist for the Raya Dunayevskaya Collection, all known surviving letters between Dunayevskaya, James, and Lee have been deposited in the collection. They were evidently so important to Dunayevskaya that in the last decade of her life she wrote three theoretical-autobiographical commentaries on them, all also included in the *Raya Dunayevskaya Collection*. See "Reflections on Notes from a Diary: Lenin's *Philosophic Notebooks* and the State-Capitalist Tendency" (Dunayevskaya 1978a, pp. 5678–88); *25 Years of Marxist-Humanism in the U.S.* (1980) (Dunayevskaya 1981–89, pp. 6383–6410); Andy Phillips and Raya Dunayevskaya, *The Coal Miners' General Strike of 1949–50 and the Birth of Marxist-Humanism in the U.S.* (1984) (Dunayevskaya 1981–89, pp. 8123–73.) I will be drawing on these reflections, as well as on the letters themselves, in the discussion that follows.

his commentary on 'The Doctrine of Being', the first section of Hegel's book. In a seeming critique of James's *Notes on Dialectics*, she writes: 'You will enjoy these notes on Being which you practically skipped over in your hurry to get to Essence'.¹⁵⁹ In this letter she stresses the concreteness of Lenin's concern with being and 'the necessity to begin with [the] simplest categories, because ... in philosophy, economics and politics ... those simple categories 'contain the whole.' In particular, she is impressed with Lenin's discussion of Hegel on appearance [*Schein*], especially Lenin's remark 'that appearance is also objective', since this challenges any attempts to reduce appearance to essence.

Although in this first letter she asks James to be patient about receiving the translation of the next section of Lenin's abstract, that on essence, less than a week later she writes: 'Herewith Lenin's Notes on Essence; I am moving faster with the translation than I had counted on'.¹⁶⁰ Once again, she stresses the dialectical relationship between appearance and essence: 'Lenin notes, further, not only that Essence must appear ... but he emphasises that even more [appearance] is "one of the determinations of essence"'. Dunayevskaya also takes up the issue of causality in this letter, stressing the way in which Lenin, following Hegel, breaks with the rigid empiricist distinction between cause and effect. In her 1978 retrospective piece Dunayevskaya sums this point up: 'At this stage, Lenin also breaks with his previous concept of causality, seeing that what is cause becomes what is effect, and vice versa, and presses home the concept of totality'.¹⁶¹ She concludes this letter to James with some glowing remarks on Hegel's dialectic: 'What a dialectician that Hegel was; nothing else can explain the sheer genius of that man's language which defines identity as "unseparated difference", and now as he enters actuality and totality, asserts that totality is found as "sundered completeness"'. She adds: 'I am ready to follow him [Lenin] into Notion'.

A few weeks later, Dunayevskaya completes the translation of Lenin's abstract, sending to James Lenin's notes on 'The Doctrine of the Notion', the third section of Hegel's *Science of Logic*. She calls attention once again to the fact that these notes are longer than all the preceding material combined and calls this an 'outstanding difference' between Lenin's view of Hegel and that in James's *Notes on Dialectics*, where James had not given very much stress to the abstract philosophical issues in Hegel's section on the notion. She also attempts a sketch of Lenin's theoretical development during the period 1914–17: 'Lenin was looking for a new universal. He found Hegel's Idea ... And even then Lenin couldn't

159 Dunayevskaya to James, 18 February 1949.

160 Dunayevskaya to James, 25 February 1949.

161 Dunayevskaya, 'Reflections on Notes from a Diary' (Dunayevskaya 1981–9, p. 5681).

fashion his new universal: revolution to a man, until there appeared the Soviets, 1917 version. The Idea had him pose the question correctly; the Russian masses supplied the practice; and then Lenin arrived and unified the two and called it: State and Revolution'.¹⁶² The rest of her letter stresses the concrete, earthy character of Hegel's section on the notion, at least in Lenin's reading of it, with its references to practice as well as theory and its treatment of labor in the section on teleology. She concludes by arguing that Lenin's remark on the need to grasp Hegel's *Science of Logic* to understand *Capital* must be read alongside his remark in the next sentence of his abstract to the effect that 'Marxists criticised the Kantians and the Humists at the beginning of the twentieth century more in the Feuerbachian (and Buchnerian) than in the Hegelian manner'. Dunayevskaya argues that, since Lenin also mentions a critique of 'Machism' in this passage, this critique of 'Marxists' thus 'evidently includes himself, as he is the only one in addition to Plekhanov who had bothered much with Machism'. Thus, to Dunayevskaya, Lenin here is making a sharp self-critique of his own early work, *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*.

During this same period Dunayevskaya was also in touch with the leading Marxist art critic Meyer Schapiro, attempting to interest him in helping her to publish her translation of Lenin's Hegel Notebooks. Schapiro responds: 'I have read Lenin's Notebooks on Hegel, in the French translation by N. Guterman (with a very long and enthusiastic preface by Guterman and Lefebvre). I don't share your great enthusiasm for Lenin's marginalia, but I am impressed by the fact that Lenin was able to immerse himself in Hegel during the war and to find some inspiration from philosophy on the eve of the most important event in his life and perhaps in all history'.¹⁶³ He also writes regarding publishing prospects that 'the notebooks of Lenin have very little actuality for American philosophers or students of Russian affairs' and suggests that she publish them in a Trotskyist theoretical journal. Two weeks later, he writes: 'Your letters are very exciting as well as excited and almost inspire me to reread Hegel – for whom I have always had a weakness'.¹⁶⁴ He further reflects on the difficulties

162 Dunayevskaya to James, 12 March 1949.

163 Handwritten letter, Schapiro to Dunayevskaya, 12 March 1949, held by the Raya Dunayevskaya Memorial Fund, 59 East Van Buren St. no. 707, Chicago, Ill., 60605. Uncatalogued books and papers of Dunayevskaya that have not been donated to the Raya Dunayevskaya Collection at Wayne State University are held by the fund, which made them available to me. Dunayevskaya's letters to Schapiro during this period could not be found; only the ones from Schapiro to her seem to have survived.

164 Handwritten letter, Schapiro to Dunayevskaya, 26 March 1949. Held by the Raya Dunayevskaya Memorial Fund. Schapiro's letter also refers to 'a French philosopher who is visiting New York, Maurice Merleau-Ponty', whom he terms 'a great enthusiastic for dialectics

of such a publishing project and concludes: 'But I will, in any case, be glad to help – when you have translated the notes and written your preface, I will gladly submit them for you to Oxford and other publishers'. None of these and other attempts to publish an English-language edition of Lenin's Hegel Notebooks came to fruition during this period. Years later Dunayevskaya wrote: 'When I completed the translation of Lenin's Abstract of Hegel's "Science of Logic" in 1949, I looked for a publisher for it, knocking on many doors and meeting with the Columbia University Russian Department, but publication had to wait until 1957 with my *Marxism and Freedom*'.¹⁶⁵ The Hegel Notebooks appeared in that work as an appendix that, so as to save space, included only Lenin's commentary and not the actual extracts from Hegel's *Science of Logic*.

Dunayevskaya continued her letters to James and Lee on Lenin's Hegel Notebooks, however. Another letter places them in the context of Lenin's other writings on dialectics after 1914. It takes up major treatments of dialectics such as Lenin's remarks during the 1920–1 Trade Union Debate, the 1922 article for *Under the Banner of Marxism*, his critique of Bukharin's *Economics of the Transition Period*, and his 1916 critique of Luxemburg's *Junius Pamphlet*. She devotes particular attention to his several critiques of Plekhanov for having never written a serious analysis of Hegel's *Science of Logic*.¹⁶⁶

A subsequent letter attempts 'to connect what was new in his [Lenin's book] Imperialism with his conclusion that none of the Marxists had understood *Capital* and particularly ... its first chapter[,] for it is impossible to understand that without comprehension of the whole of Hegel's *Logic*'. To Dunayevskaya, Hegel's *Science of Logic* enabled Lenin to view imperialism as an immanent development from within the economic structure of capitalism. She further connects the Hegelian idea to *State and Revolution*, where the worker, according to Lenin, '“to a man” runs the economy, makes the revolution, transforms the ideal into the real ... and later fights the bureaucracy in his own workers state to protect the workers from its state'.¹⁶⁷ In an apparent reply to some of Dunayevskaya's writings on Lenin and Hegel,¹⁶⁸ a reply that was addressed

and an admirer of L.T. [Leon Trotsky]'; and to Kojève's book on Hegel, just published in France.

165 *Guide to the Raya Dunayevskaya Collection* 1986 (Dunayevskaya 1981–89, p. 59). In 'Reflections on Notes from a Diary', Dunayevskaya writes that in 1949 she also tried to give the translation of the Hegel Notebooks for publication 'to the swp [Socialist Workers Party], which considered the Notebooks hardly more than "scribbles", "too rough and incomplete"' (Dunayevskaya 1981–89 p. 5688).

166 Dunayevskaya to James, 14 May 1949.

167 Dunayevskaya to James, 17 May 1949.

168 In 'Reflections on Notes from a Diary', Dunayevskaya complains of James's and Lee's slow-

to Lee, James stresses that the difference between Lenin's *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* and his Hegel Notebooks lies in the fact that in 1908 Lenin 'had to battle for plain materialism' and that 'reading the book over I find no inadequacy'.¹⁶⁹ He thus seems to express caution about Dunayevskaya's earlier expressed critique of *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*. By 1914, however, James continues, Lenin's opponent is the labour bureaucracy and the Second International. Consequently, 'socialism itself is in question; not from liberal idealists, not from Kantians, but from avowed Marxists, materialists. Therefore his study of the Logic had to clarify materialism, not materialism from idealism, but vulgar materialism from dialectical materialism'.¹⁷⁰ In this sense, James writes, Lenin moved from his Hegel studies to *State and Revolution*. James connects all this to immediate theoretical perspectives for the Johnson-Forest Tendency's battles within Trotskyism.

In a subsequent letter to Dunayevskaya summing up a discussion between James and Lee (27 May 1949), they express more ambivalence toward Hegel than does Dunayevskaya when they write: 'Marx's critique of the Hegelian dialectic in 1844 must be brought in. Very vicious against Hegel's idealism'. They connect Lenin's debate with the Second International to the categories of being and essence in Hegel's *Science of Logic*: 'Previous to 1914 the whole revolutionary movement, the 2nd International and all the rest of them were essentially in the Realm of Being. Even Lenin before 1914 was not very conscious of Essence although [the] objective situation in Russia drove him to the Logic. The key to Lenin's notes on Logic is this relation to Essence ... The movement in the realm of Essence is the expansion of the concrete individual, developing subjectivity. This is a revolutionary movement'. They tend to dismiss Hegel's doctrine of the notion, writing that 'Lenin is more concerned with self-movement than he is with the Notion'. In addition, they connect the notion to 'the dialectic of the party', which they consider to be a 'counter-revolutionary movement', one that drives humanity toward a 'most merciless tyranny'. This sharp critique of political parties is in keeping with the spontaneist framework of James's *Notes on Dialectics*. During the same period Dunayevskaya read and summarised in English some issues surrounding Lenin's massive *Notebooks on Imperialism*.¹⁷¹

ness in responding to her letters, something she attributes to theoretical differences, differences that became apparent only later.

169 James to Lee, 20 May 1949.

170 James to Lee, 20 May 1949.

171 Dunayevskaya to James, 8 June 1949.

James's next letter is somewhat disparaging of Dunayevskaya's efforts to translate and comment on the Hegel Notebooks: 'You are covering a lot of ground and it is pretty good. But after some conversations with G [Lee], & reading (carefully, this time) your correspondence, I feel that we are still off the point' (James to Dunayevskaya, 6/10/49). In another letter, he writes: 'we must be on guard against giving the impression (false) that L [Lenin] read a book and understood. That would strangle us. No dialectic taught him to formulate, clarify, concretise objective stages, etc.' (James to Lee, 6/19/49). James thus seems to question Dunayevskaya's concept of a radical break in Lenin's thought after his 1914–15 study of Hegel.

Dunayevskaya does not argue the point directly but instead writes a detailed analysis of Lenin's theoretical positions from the 1890s to 1917. She stresses the central importance of the Hegel Notebooks and of Hegel to Marxism: 'You do not know Capital, not even its first chapter unless you know the *whole* of the Logic. Capital is not an abstract universal, it is an aggregate of the most concrete, and that means also there is no separation between logic and history ... And it isn't only logic and history but Notion. The dialectic of Ch. 1 [of *Capital*] includes, I believe, the notion, too, in the fetishism of commodities ... A wealth of particulars, and Absolute Idea, there, says Lenin, you find the best in the dialectic'.¹⁷² In this evocation not only of Hegelian idealism but even of the absolute idea, Dunayevskaya posed the issues differently from James's approach. He writes again almost immediately, suggesting that she confine her analysis of Lenin and Hegel to '1200 words' and also referring her to his *Notes on Dialectics*, which he writes 'must be read and re-read'.¹⁷³ He follows this up with another letter that begins: 'We must not by the way forget that we must attack Hegelianism'.¹⁷⁴

Dunayevskaya's July 6, 1949 letter to James uses the work of the Russian religious Hegel scholar Ivan Ilyin to show that Hegel stressed that the word *concrete* comes from the Latin *concrecere*, meaning 'to grow'. She uses Ilyin's term describing Hegel's standpoint, 'concrete empiric',¹⁷⁵ to characterise as well Lenin's theorising in his Hegel Notebooks and *Notebooks on Imperialism*: 'The moment he looked at the world with the new Marxian-Hegelian eyes he saw that the empiric concrete world of imperialism was something quite differ-

172 Dunayevskaya to James, 20 June 1949.

173 James to Dunayevskaya, 24 June 1949.

174 James to Dunayevskaya, 28 June 1949.

175 For an edition in a Western language, see Ilyin 1946, especially Chapter 1. Dunayevskaya was aware that Lenin had expressed admiration for Ilyin's work.

ent from the catchword of imperialism ... that behind it was a new absolute, MONOPOLY.¹⁷⁶ In this letter she also outlines for the first time five specific changes in Lenin's thought as a result of his having studied Hegel: (1) after 1914 Lenin links the phenomenon of imperialism to monopoly capitalism; (2) Lenin now sees monopoly as a specific newer and higher stage of capitalism, somewhat different from the capitalism analysed by Marx and Engels; (3) Lenin now ties reformism and 'opportunism' to a new group of workers created by imperialism and monopoly, the aristocracy of labour, which is opposed to the unskilled workers; (4) before 1914 self-determination of nations was a slogan, but 'post-1914 Lenin sees imperialism creating an URGENCY on the question of self-determination'; and (5) now 'dialectics becomes *the* theory of knowledge', not merely an element of Marxism before 1914.

Lee, who had been relatively silent, now enters the discussion seriously, apparently excited by this last letter by Dunayevskaya. At the top of a copy sent to Dunayevskaya of a letter she has addressed to James,¹⁷⁷ she writes: 'Yours of the 6th was wonderful'. She begins her analysis by quoting Lenin's March 1914 article on Taylorism as something that could be taken over and used under socialism,¹⁷⁸ an attitude that she connects to a fundamental Kantianism within pre-World War I socialist thought: 'They all thought this way before 1914. There was developing efficiency, rationalisation, socialisation of labor in the objective world – which they empirically contemplated, understood, explained, just as Kant did'. According to Lee, in his discussion of causality in Hegel's *Science of Logic*, 'Lenin breaks with this kind of inconsistent empiricism. He sees the limitations of the scientific method, e.g., the category of causality to explain the relation between mind and matter. Freedom, subjectivity, notion – those are the categories by which we will gain knowledge of the objectively real'. Lee writes that Lenin is saying: 'Don't stay in the realm of Essence, inner necessity, connections. Get into the realm of Notion, freedom, revolution'. She contrasts Lenin's Hegelian Marxism not only to pre-1914 socialist thought but also to the scientific and positivist Marxism of his fellow Bolshevik Bukharin.

James does not seem to agree with Lee's analysis: 'Your letter on Bukharin disappointed me. Some of the material was precious but the whole thing seemed to me off the track'.¹⁷⁹ Dunayevskaya continues to write on Lenin versus Bukharin and the development of Lenin's thought before and after 1914. Lee

¹⁷⁶ Dunayevskaya to James, 6 July 1949.

¹⁷⁷ Lee to James, 9 July 1949.

¹⁷⁸ CW 20:152–4.

¹⁷⁹ James to Lee, 15 July 1949.

now writes another probing letter, where she begins by stating: 'When Lenin reaches the chapter on the Absolute Idea, he is completely at home. You can feel it in his comments and his selections'.¹⁸⁰ Lee's second point is in keeping with the Johnson-Forest Tendency's inclination to connect Lenin and Hegel on dialectics to concrete political issues in a fairly direct fashion; she writes that the final chapter of the *Science of Logic* on the absolute idea 'is directed, not against the reformists, but against the counter-revolutionists within the revolution'. She is referring to their theory of the rise of Stalinism and of Soviet state capitalism, which are seen as a counterrevolution emerging from within the 1917 Russian Revolution and negating its original liberatory content. The type of absolute liberation that Hegel stresses in the absolute idea chapter is connected by Lee to the original emancipatory concept of revolution, as, for example, in Lenin's *State and Revolution*: 'Is it too much to think that *we* and *Lenin* would have substituted the word *Revolution*, permanent revolution, every time Hegel used the word *Absolute Idea*'.

The next few letters deal directly with categories from Hegel rather than with Lenin's Hegel Notebooks, but a subsequent letter by Dunayevskaya addresses changes in Lenin's thought after his study of Hegel. She writes that in '1914–16 there come the magnificent philosophic notebooks and from then on nothing, absolutely nothing, fails to bear the stamp of Hegelian dialectic'.¹⁸¹ From this point on the correspondence moves away from consideration of Lenin's Hegel Notebooks to discussions of the structure of Marx's *Capital*.¹⁸² By 1950 and 1951 the intensive theoretical exchanges in letter form have also become far less frequent. One product of the group's theoretical discussions during this period was James's 1950 pamphlet, coauthored by Dunayevskaya and Lee, entitled *State Capitalism and World Revolution*.¹⁸³ That pamphlet does not take up Lenin's Hegel Notebooks or even Hegel very much, confining itself mainly to political and economic issues, with only a brief and somewhat superficial section on dialectics, the latter drafted mainly by Lee. Another such result was Dunayevskaya's draft for a 'Lenin Book', completed in early 1952. Although it

180 Lee to James, 29 July 1949.

181 Dunayevskaya to James, 30 August 1949.

182 In one fairly important letter written in 1951, however, Dunayevskaya attempts to specify when Lenin finished reading Hegel in order to find 'precisely the date of his LEAP' (Dunayevskaya to James, 16 June 1951).

183 James, Dunayevskaya and Lee 1986 [1950]. The original 1950 mimeographed edition was produced as a Socialist Workers Party internal bulletin. Shortly after its publication, the Johnson-Forest Tendency left the SWP to found a non-Trotskyist, decentralised non-party type organisation, the Correspondence Committees.

includes some discussion of the Hegel Notebooks, this draft is mainly concerned with Lenin's political and economic theory.¹⁸⁴

After this period Lee and James did not really develop very much more on Lenin's Hegel Notebooks. Dunayevskaya, however, who of the three had been the most interested in the notebooks, continued for the rest of her life to occupy herself with them as part of the foundation of a general concept of dialectic that she worked out in the late 1950s as Marxist Humanism. Her lengthy letters on Hegel's absolutes, composed in May 1953, just after Stalin's death, were an especially important effort on her part in this regard. Although devoted mainly to the text of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Mind*, *Science of Logic*, and *Philosophy of Mind*, these letters, addressed to Lee, also ground themselves in Lenin's Hegel Notebooks.

She discusses briefly Lenin's sixteen-point definition of dialectics in the notebooks but also distances herself not only from this definition but also from James's *Notes on Dialectics*, sometimes referred to as the Nevada document: 'We, however, can go further, and not only further than Lenin but further than we ourselves did in 1948 when the Nevada Dialectics so profoundly held forth on the positive in the negative'.¹⁸⁵ By going intensively into the absolute idea in Hegel's *Science of Logic*, Dunayevskaya is moving into an area in Hegel's text that neither Lenin nor other Hegelian Marxists discuss in much detail. She points to the notion of liberation [*Befreiung*], which Hegel develops in the absolute idea chapter, where 'a subject is personal and free'.¹⁸⁶

In a critical appreciation of Lenin's Hegel Notebooks, she points to his stress on the way in which, in the last paragraph of the absolute idea chapter, Hegel mentions a transition from logic to nature. Lenin calls this the 'transition of the logical idea to Nature', which he terms 'stretching a hand to materialism'.¹⁸⁷ Lenin, however, also writes that the rest of Hegel's concluding paragraph 'is unimportant'.¹⁸⁸ Dunayevskaya responds passionately: 'But, my dear Vladimir Ilyitch, it is not true; the end of that page is important; we of 1953, who have lived 3 decades after you and tried to absorb all you have left us we can tell you that'.¹⁸⁹ This is the point in Hegel's text where he breaks with the concept of

184 Included in Dunayevskaya 1981–9, pp. 1735–96.

185 Dunayevskaya 1989, p. 32. This edition includes explanatory notes by Dunayevskaya's colleagues.

186 Dunayevskaya 1989, p. 33.

187 Dunayevskaya 1989, p. 36.

188 Ibid.

189 Ibid.

transition [*Übergang*] and uses the term *liberation* [*Befreiung*] when he writes that rather than being ‘a perfected becoming or a transition’,¹⁹⁰ the ‘pure Idea ... is an absolute liberation’.¹⁹¹ Furthermore, writes Hegel, ‘there is no transition in this freedom’; rather, ‘the Idea freely releases itself in absolute self-security and self-repose’.¹⁹²

To Dunayevskaya this was a part of Hegel’s dialectic that could take Marxism beyond Lenin, who wrote on Marxist theory before the rise of the single-party totalitarian state.¹⁹³ She now writes: ‘You see, Vladimir Ilyitch, you didn’t have Stalinism to overcome, when transitions, revolutions seemed sufficient to bring the new society. Now everyone looks at the totalitarian one-party state, *that* is the new that must be overcome by a totally new revolt in which everyone experiences “absolute liberation”. So we build with you from 1920–23 and include the experiences of three decades’.¹⁹⁴ The letters also take up absolute mind in Hegel’s *Philosophy of Mind*, finding there, in Hegel’s concept of the ‘self-thinking idea’, a radical concept of subjectivity. In this sense, Dunayevskaya sees Lenin’s Hegel Notebooks as helping to pose the problem of reconstituting a Marxist dialectic in the 1950s, a period when Marxism was in deep crisis. Nonetheless, Lenin’s Notebooks are not by themselves the answer to that crisis, which needed to be met by another, deeper probing into Hegel’s idealistic absolutes, the absolute idea and the absolute mind.

Lee’s initial response to these letters is quite favourable: ‘I think that these notes represent our Philosophic Notebooks, comparable to those of vL in 1915’.¹⁹⁵ She adds that where Aristotle’s concept of the absolute ‘was based on a slave society’, Hegel’s has a different basis: ‘Hegel’s was the result of the dialectical movement of the history of society and the history of the pure form of the movement, and moved from the Absolute Idea to Nature, showing the same dialectical development in Nature as had been in Mind’. The theorists of the Johnson-Forest Tendency did not develop further their view of the place of Lenin’s Hegel Notebooks in Marxism, or even Hegel’s dialectic in general.

190 Ibid.

191 Dunayevskaya 1989, p. 37. The Hegel scholar Patricia Altenbernd Johnson’s article ‘Women’s Liberation: Following Dunayevskaya in Practicing Dialectics’ (Johnson 1989, pp. 65–74), develops this shift in Hegel’s terminology from transition [*Übergang*] to liberation [*Befreiung*] as a key one for feminist theory.

192 Dunayevskaya 1989, p. 37.

193 Obviously, Dunayevskaya here sees totalitarianism in the Soviet Union beginning with Stalin rather than Lenin.

194 Dunayevskaya 1989, p. 37.

195 Lee to Dunayevskaya, 22 May 1953.

Within two years, in 1955, the group broke apart. Dunayevskaya went on to develop a discussion of Lenin's Hegel Notebooks over the next three decades,¹⁹⁶ while James and Lee moved in other directions, first together and then separately.¹⁹⁷

196 Her 1953 letters became the basis for all of her subsequent work on dialectics. The first thorough published analysis in English of Lenin's Hegel Notebooks came in Dunayevskaya 1958, a work that also includes Lenin's Hegel Notebooks as an appendix – the first published English translation of them, which includes only Lenin's remarks, not his long extracts from Hegel's *Science of Logic*. Dunayevskaya made many further discussions of Lenin and Hegel, as will be seen in the next chapter.

197 Lee and James remained colleagues until the early 1960s, during which period they co-authored *Facing Reality* with Cornelius Castoriadis (see James, Lee and Castoriadis 1974 [1958]). James, whose work is extensively chronicled in Buhle 1988, became a noted Third World Marxist and culture critic, living mainly in Britain. Lee, who took the name Boggs from her husband, a Black labour activist, remained a writer and an activist within the US Left. See, for example, Boggs and Boggs 1976.

From 1954 to Today: Lefebvre, Colletti, Althusser, and Dunayevskaya

After Stalin's death in 1953 important discussions of Lenin's Hegel Notebooks by major figures within the Western Marxist tradition continued, not only in France and the United States, but also in Italy and, to a lesser extent, West Germany. In the 1950s and early 1960s it was France that once again experienced the most extensive discussion, not only from Lefebvre, but also from Roger Garaudy, Louis Althusser, and, more briefly, the existential Marxist Maurice Merleau-Ponty. In the United States Dunayevskaya published the first English translation of the Hegel Notebooks and made a number of critical analyses of them. Lucio Colletti introduced the notebooks to Italian readers, while in West Germany there was somewhat less discussion, with the writings of Iring Fetscher constituting an exception in this regard. Although these theorists discussed the significance of Lenin's Hegel Notebooks from a wide variety of traditions, at no time did the interest in the notebooks approach that accorded to the writings of the young Marx in the same period. Of the theorists mentioned above, only Dunayevskaya made the notebooks really central to her overall theoretical project, with an extensive series of writings stretching from the 1950s through the 1980s. These culminated in a sharply critical analysis of Lenin's appreciation of Hegel in 1986–7, just before Dunayevskaya's death.

1 France in the 1950s: Lefebvre and Garaudy

Merleau-Ponty discusses Lenin in his *Adventures of the Dialectic* (1955), in a brief polemical chapter entitled 'Pravda'. Here, with some justice, Merleau-Ponty contrasts the Western Marxism of Lukács and Korsch in the 1920s to Lenin's *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*, 'which was then becoming the charter of Russian Marxism'. This book had, according to Merleau-Ponty, 're-established the pre-Hegelian theory of knowledge'.¹ Merleau-Ponty comments acidly: 'Yet one does not see how a pre-Hegelian gnosticism or even a pre-

¹ Merleau-Ponty 1973 [1955], pp. 59–60.

Kantian one could introduce a Marxist dialectic'.² Merleau-Ponty also mentions Lenin's Hegel Notebooks, writing that 'this meditation on Hegel would scarcely leave the succinct "gnosticism" of *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* intact',³ but he does not develop this point further. Never having seriously taken up the Hegel Notebooks, he then pits the Lukács of *History and Class Consciousness* against the Lenin of *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*, which as a crude version of materialism had become the official Communist text on Marxist philosophy. He then laments Lukács's subsequent shift away from his 1923 position to a defence of what he terms 'Leninism' in philosophy.

Merleau-Ponty's book expresses his break not only with French Communism but also with Jean-Paul Sartre, who continued to support the Communist party on many political issues. The party responded immediately to the book, holding a large meeting in 1955 in Paris, where its leading theorists attacked the book crudely and mercilessly, producing critiques that were published in 1956 under the extremely tendentious title *Mésaventures de l'anti-Marxisme*. In the main speech, Roger Garaudy, in this period the party's chief philosopher, predictably accused Merleau-Ponty of 'idealism' and 'neo-capitalist reformism' and also attacked him for spurning 'real Marxism, that of Marx and Engels, that of Lenin and Stalin'.⁴ Throughout this meeting Lenin's *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* was defended as the canonical statement of Marxist materialism; Merleau-Ponty's notions were denounced as bourgeois idealism and subjectivism. Lefebvre's briefer contribution centred on an ironical attack on Merleau-Ponty as a professor in an ivory tower and ended with a vague invitation to any young person in the audience 'to become a revolutionary'.⁵ The brief contribution that Lukács had sent to be read to the conference attacked his own *History and Class Consciousness* as 'false and dépassé'.⁶ He contrasted Merleau-Ponty's 'idealist dialectic' to 'the real development of dialectical materialism by Lenin and since Lenin'.⁷ Although Merleau-Ponty had at least mentioned Lenin's Hegel Notebooks briefly in his book, *not one* of the Com-

2 Merleau-Ponty 1973 [1955], p. 61.

3 Ibid.

4 Garaudy, et al. 1956, pp. 8–9. For accounts in English of this arid controversy, see Poster 1975, pp. 174–9, and Kelly 1982, pp. 89–93.

5 Lefebvre in Garaudy, et al. 1956, p. 106. The year before, Lefebvre's 'Lenine Philosophe' appeared in the French party journal, *La Pensée* (Lefebvre 1954, pp. 18–36). Lefebvre was here so preoccupied with Lenin on materialism, on the party, and so on, that at the end of this rather pedestrian essay he lamented that 'I hardly have the time to speak of the Philosophical Notebooks' (p. 35).

6 Lukács in Garaudy, et al. 1956, p. 158.

7 Lukács in Garaudy, et al. 1956, p. 159.

munist philosophers so much as mentioned them, whereas they all defended *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* as the last word on dialectical materialism. This was true even though (1) the French Communist party publishing house had that very same year, 1955, published an 'official' edition of Lenin's *Philosophical Notebooks*, and (2) most of their attacks on Merleau-Ponty's book centred on answering the latter's critique of Lenin. Thus the party theorists, including Lefebvre, implicitly accepted Merleau-Ponty's claim that *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* represented Leninism. Indeed it did, in terms of the official Soviet-sanctioned version of Leninism, developed into a dogma under Stalin.

But the problem of getting a serious reading of Lenin's Hegel Notebooks also came from serious independent philosophers such as Merleau-Ponty and Hyppolite. Although they were on occasion willing to take up Marx directly, concentrating much of their discussion around Marx's 1844 *Manuscripts*, thus challenging Stalinist dogma, they were apparently not interested in doing so in a serious way with Lenin's writings, even his Hegel Notebooks. This generally left the field to official 'Leninists' when it came to defining Lenin's Marxism.

In the same months, but totally unconnected to the critique of Merleau-Ponty, the party theoretical journal *Cahiers du Communisme* gave Garaudy the task of discussing Lenin's just-published *Philosophical Notebooks*. As with other Soviet-inspired editions, this volume included many texts by Lenin on philosophers other than Hegel, unlike Guterman and Lefebvre's 1938 edition, which limited itself to the 'Abstract of Hegel's *Science of Logic*'. A loyal party theorist, Émile Bottigelli, wrote the preface for the 1955 French edition.⁸ Garaudy's lengthy article was a highly ideological treatment of the *Philosophical Notebooks*. He situates the work in 'the practical tasks which posed philosophical problems to Lenin', especially the breakup of the Second International, the writing of *Imperialism*, and the correct tactics to form a true Communist party.⁹

Far from seriously examining Hegelian idealism, as did Lenin in the notebooks, Garaudy, without citing Lenin, informs the reader that 'the central theme of Lenin's philosophical studies is the materialist dialectic' versus the positions of 'the idealist, Hegel'.¹⁰ He also quotes Lenin's statement, drawn

8 V.I. Lenin, *Cahiers Philosophiques*, trans. Lida Vernant and Émile Bottigelli, intro. Émile Bottigelli (Paris: Éditions Sociales, 1955). This edition put Lenin's Hegel Notebooks back in print in France, Guterman and Lefebvre's edition having been destroyed under the Nazi occupation. The latter edition was reprinted by Gallimard in 1967. After he was expelled from the Communist party, Lefebvre complained that this 1955 party edition of Lenin's *Philosophical Notebooks* "did not mention the first edition" at all. See Lefebvre 1959, p. 85.

9 Garaudy 1956, p. 131.

10 Garaudy 1956, p. 133.

almost directly from Hegel's concept of the practical idea in the *Logic*, that 'practice is higher than theoretical knowledge'. Then, whether through ignorance or malice toward Hegel, despite this statement's Hegelian origins, Garaudy twists it into an attack by Lenin on Hegel when he contrasts this 'Leninist' sense of 'practice' to Hegelian 'abstract knowledge'.¹¹ Garaudy's reading is at variance with the interpretations of the same passages in Lenin by Lukács and Lefebvre, as we have seen. In the actual text of Lenin's Notebooks, this statement on the superiority of practice is a marginal note to a long quotation from Hegel's *Science of Logic*, where Hegel finds the practical idea to be 'superior to the Idea of Cognition already considered for it possesses not only the worth of the universal but also of the out-and-out actual'.¹² Garaudy gives no indication, however, that the concept of practice appears directly in Hegel's text, implying that the emphasis on the practical was Lenin's alone and part of a critique of Hegel. The second half of Garaudy's essay praises the contributions to the concept of dialectic by Mao, Stalin, Engels, and French party leader Maurice Thorez.

The only important discussion of Lenin's Hegel Notebooks in France during the 1950s was in Lefebvre's *La Pensée de Lenine* (1957).¹³ This work's eighty-page chapter on Lenin's philosophical thought, however, has a form different from either the discussion of Lenin in Lefebvre's *Logique formelle, logique dialectique* or that in Lefebvre and Guterman's 1938 introduction to Lenin's *Cahiers sur la dialectique de Hegel*. In *La Pensée de Lenine* the discussion of Lenin's relation to Hegel is more muted, and there is a lengthier treatment of *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*.

Less than half of the chapter on Lenin and philosophy is devoted to the Hegel Notebooks. On the *Philosophical Notebooks* as a whole, Lefebvre writes: 'In this body of material, as vast as it is disconnected, one's interest focuses on the fragments on Hegel and especially the fragments on the *Logic*. But it would be a serious error to isolate the latter. The other fragments prepare, comment on or deepen Lenin's texts on the *Logic*, which constitute in themselves a profound and rich treatment – even though a fragmentary one – of the dialectic and the materialist theory of knowledge'.¹⁴ This may be an implicit self-critique of his and Guterman's edition of the Hegel Notebooks, which published Lenin's 'Abstract of Hegel's *Science of Logic*' by itself instead of following the format that

11 Garaudy 1956, p. 140.

12 *SL* 818–19; *CW* 38:212–13.

13 Lefebvre 1957.

14 Lefebvre 1957, p. 162.

the Moscow editors had developed from 1932 on: the publication of a volume entitled *Philosophical Notebooks* mixing together many disparate sets of notes by Lenin on philosophical issues, some from as early as 1895.

By leaving his discussion of Lenin's Hegel Notebooks for the end, however, Lefebvre seems to consider them to be the culmination of Lenin's philosophical thought, even though he never says so directly. In repeated references to Marx's 1858 letter indicating his desire to write a short critical work on Hegelian dialectics, a work that apparently was never written, Lefebvre argues that Lenin's Hegel Notebooks 'bring the Marxist movement what it was lacking: these notes contain the treatise on methodology and logic that Marx did not have the time to elaborate'.¹⁵

Lefebvre ascribes three general conclusions to Lenin in the Hegel Notebooks: (1) There is a need to separate Hegel's mysticism from the logical aspects of his theory of knowledge. (2) Marxist thinkers have neglected this; for example, Plekhanov wrote nothing on Hegel's *Science of Logic*. (3) Although on the one hand Hegel thought that materialism did not exist as a philosophy, his objective idealism, and especially his absolute idealism, ends by coming very close to materialism. Throughout *La Pensée de Lenine* Lefebvre concentrates on Lenin's treatment in the notebooks of Hegel's concept of essence: 'We already know that analysis must brush aside appearances to attain the essential. Scientific cognition defines itself as the knowing of essences. He who refuses the notion of essence refuses by this even the notion of laws'.¹⁶ In a footnote to this statement he adds: 'Certain philosophers will therefore name the Marxist-Leninist theory "essentialism", in opposition to existentialism'.¹⁷ Lefebvre claims further that Lenin (with Hegel) critiques most philosophers for instead seeing the phenomenon as containing 'the infinite profundity of reality'.¹⁸ Thus, for Lefebvre, essence is the true reality. He gives the following example: 'revolution is a violent historical and social phenomenon that seems without laws', yet 'every revolution has its (dialectical) laws'.¹⁹

A second example of the importance of essence returns Lefebvre to the themes of his early work, co-authored with Guterman. These include both their book *La Conscience mystifiée* (1936) and their introduction to Lenin's Hegel Notebooks (1938; composed in 1935). He writes: 'Immobilised, fetishised

15 Lefebvre 1957, p. 186.

16 Lefebvre 1957, p. 187.

17 Ibid.

18 Lefebvre 1957, p. 188.

19 Lefebvre 1957, p. 190.

appearance becomes a mystifying, oppressive reality ... Bourgeois democracy envelops, masks and protects capitalism; but if one pushes it to the limit, if one takes it at its word, a contradiction appears and must resolve itself between appearance and reality. Bourgeois democratic liberties are therefore not only a means for maintaining the legality of proletarian organisations (unions, party, etc.). In reality, they can be a principle and a possibility of a leap towards socialism'.²⁰ At a theoretical level these lines seem to nuance his claim of 'essentialism' that I cited earlier. In a footnote he reveals that 'these lines were written in 1935, in the preface to the Gallimard edition'²¹ of Lenin's *Hegel Notebooks*.

The penultimate section of Lefebvre's chapter on Lenin and philosophy is entitled 'Relative and Absolute. Infinite and Finite'. Here he takes the position that for Marxism and especially for Lenin, 'everything is relative'.²² Laws of history and society vary according to historical circumstances. In addition, Lefebvre quotes Lenin to the effect that our own cognition, which reflects nature, 'can never comprehend = reflect = mirror nature as a whole' but rather 'can only eternally come closer to this'.²³ Therefore, for Lenin (and Hegel) 'the absolute finds in its deepest heart, one might say, the relative, right in its bosom'.²⁴

The final section of Lefebvre's chapter is entitled 'The Theory of Reflection and of the Concept'. Here he suggests that, whereas Hegel is concerned with the idea, Marx and Lenin focus instead on nature: 'For Hegel, the absolute principle is called the Idea. For Marx, and even more clearly for Lenin, this absolute principle, the concrete-universal, is called *Nature* (material)'.²⁵ Nonetheless, Lefebvre notes that Lenin did not reject Hegel out of hand for focusing on the idea and 'could not find strong enough words of praise for Hegel, who, in his idealist terminology, had called the Idea, Nature'.²⁶

Indeed, not only did Lenin not focus solely on Hegel's discussion of essence, but Lefebvre quotes Lenin to the effect that the sections on the idea in the doctrine of the notion in both Hegel's *Science of Logic* and *Encyclopedia Logic* are 'the best exposition of dialectics'.²⁷ The section on the idea is not in the book on essence but in the third book of the *Science of Logic*, 'Subjective Logic, or the

20 Lefebvre 1957, p. 195.

21 Ibid.

22 Ibid.

23 Lefebvre 1957, p. 197; see also *cw* 38:182.

24 Lefebvre 1957, p. 197.

25 Lefebvre 1957, p. 197.

26 Lefebvre 1957, p. 201.

27 Lefebvre 1957, p. 202; see also *cw* 38:192.

Doctrine of the Notion'. Here Lefebvre quotes Lenin's notebooks to the effect that the section on the absolute idea 'contains almost nothing that is specially idealism, but has for its main subject the dialectical method'.²⁸ To many other Marxist commentators, including Lukács, the absolute idea is on the contrary the most idealistic and least useful part of Hegel's work.

Lefebvre then sums up one of Lenin's definitions of dialectics, the one that gives three aspects: (1) the need to consider a concept in its relations and its development, (2) the law of contradiction, (3) the unity of analysis and synthesis. Lefebvre now seems to resist such simple definitions, however, noting that 'this definition no longer satisfied Lenin and he detailed one in sixteen points'.²⁹ More important, Lefebvre has also moved a great distance from any crude form of materialism when he writes in his concluding pages that for Lenin, as regards 'the distinction between the ideal and the real, it too is relative'.³⁰ Thus, Lefebvre ends his discussion of Lenin and Hegel by coming very close to describing the Marxist dialectic as the unity of idealism and materialism.

As noted earlier, however, this chapter on Lenin and philosophy includes much discussion of Lenin's earlier, more narrowly materialist writings, especially *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*, which seems to be contradicted or refuted by the Hegel Notebooks. Lefebvre draws no such distinction here, however. The reader is thus left with two contradictory views of Lenin on dialectics: a 1908 Lenin who had a crude materialist reflection theory in which ideas copy 'matter' and a 1914–15 Lenin who, in his Hegel Notebooks, comes close to calling for a unity of idealism and materialism in Marxist dialectics. Clearly the French Communist party in the 1950s was no place to explore this duality.

Soon afterward Lefebvre was expelled from the party after having been a member for three decades. He responded by publishing an 800-page autobiographical treatise, *La Somme et le reste* (1959), a book that includes many sharp critiques of the party. He also makes a few further remarks on Lenin and Hegel, for the first time publicly pointing to key changes in Lenin's thought after his encounter with Hegel: 'He did not read or study Hegel seriously until 1914–15. Also, if one considers it objectively, one notices a great difference in tone and content between the *Cahiers sur la dialectique* and *Materialisme et Empirio-Criticisme*. Lenin's thought becomes supple, alive ... in a word, dialectical. Lenin

28 Lefebvre 1957, p. 202; see also *cw* 38:234.

29 Lefebvre 1957, p. 203.

30 Lefebvre 1957, p. 204.

did not truly understand the dialectic until 1914, after the collapse of the International'.³¹ Lefebvre adds in a footnote: 'Here we see the significance of the profound reticence of the Stalinists toward the Notebooks, who for a long time put them aside in favor of *Materialisme et Empirio-Criticisme*'.³² It had taken Lefebvre more than twenty years since he first wrote on the Hegel Notebooks to express this publicly.

Lefebvre also stresses the incompleteness of Lenin's Hegel Notebooks, holding that 'they do not constitute an elaborated whole'.³³ In his autobiography Lefebvre also quotes several key passages from the Hegel Notebooks and from his and Guterman's introduction to the first French edition. He concludes that 'there is an abyss between *Materialisme et Empirio-Criticisme* and the notes on Hegel's Logic'. He adds suggestively: 'Only a careful exegesis and a method as precise as the one which is applied to the texts of Descartes and Spinoza would permit a scientific answer'³⁴ to this problem of the changes in Lenin's thought.³⁵ Lefebvre himself does not undertake such a project. Instead, after his expulsion from the party in 1958, he moved in other directions, including studies of everyday life and elaborations of his own concept of a dialectic that is neither materialist nor idealist. Ultimately, he became a major figure in the radical left of the 1960s.³⁶

2 The United States in the 1950s and 1960s: The Impact of Dunayevskaya's *Marxism and Freedom*

Dunayevskaya's *Marxism and Freedom* (1958) carried the first serious discussion in English of Lenin's relation to Hegel, as well as the first published Eng-

31 Lefebvre 1959, p. 85.

32 Ibid.

33 Lefebvre 1959, p. 86.

34 Lefebvre 1959, p. 498.

35 The party establishment reacted as crudely to Lefebvre's book as it had, earlier, to Merleau-Ponty's, commissioning the young Lucien Sève to write a critique (Sève 1960.) In 200 pages on Lenin Sève manages never to mention the Hegel Notebooks, using *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* once again to batter an opponent of Stalinism. Sève accuses Lefebvre of idealism for viewing idealism as well as materialism as key postulates for Lenin (pp. 143–4), all the while quoting (in 1960!) such 'authorities' as Stalin's chief ideologue, Andrei Zhdanov, by then discredited even in the Soviet Union.

36 For an account of Lefebvre's later development see Hirsch 1981. See also sociologist and former Lefebvre student Pierre Lantz's memorial article, published after Lefebvre's death in 1990 (Lantz 1992).

lish translation of the Hegel Notebooks.³⁷ An abbreviated version of Dunayevskaya's translation, for which, as we saw in the previous chapter, she tried in vain to find an American publisher, appeared as a twenty-five-page appendix to this work.³⁸ Space constraints required that the appendix omit Lenin's lengthy quotations from Hegel and reproduce only most of his commentary, with page references to the standard English editions of Hegel's *Science of Logic* and his *History of Philosophy*. Another appendix contains Dunayevskaya's translations of two key essays from Marx's 1844 *Manuscripts*, 'Private Property and Communism' and 'Critique of the Hegelian Dialectic'. Thus, in the English-speaking world, Lenin's Hegel Notebooks appeared for the first time alongside Marx's 1844 *Manuscripts*. The book also carried an appreciative but critical preface by Marcuse, who wrote that with the exception of Lukács's work and that of a few French commentators, Marx's concept of dialectic had too often become 'formalised into a technical method, or schematised into a *Weltanschauung*'. Raya Dunayevskaya's book discards these and similar distortions and tries to capture the integral unity of Marxian theory at its very foundation: in the humanistic philosophy'.³⁹ Marcuse also wrote that while agreeing 'in all essentials with the theoretical interpretation of the Marxian oeuvre'⁴⁰ in the first parts of the book, he disagreed both with Dunayevskaya's interpretation of Lenin and the Russian Revolution and with her view of the contemporary position of the working class.

Marxism and Freedom begins with a discussion of Hegel and the French Revolution, including a brief treatment of Hegel's absolutes that ties what the author saw as the living character of Hegel's concept of absolute negativity to a critique of the totalitarian system in the Soviet Union. She points especially to the Stalinist ideologue Andrei Zhdanov's 1947 attack on Hegel and discusses his attempt to substitute for Hegel's dialectic a new dialectical law of 'criticism and self-criticism'.⁴¹ Dunayevskaya then takes up Marx's 1844 *Manuscripts*, which

37 Dunayevskaya 1958. Note that this is the original edition of Dunayevska's work, not the 1988 edition.

38 Dunayevskaya 1958, pp. 326–55. Actually, a version of this translation had already appeared in mimeographed form as the first pamphlet of News and Letters Committees, the group that Dunayevskaya founded in 1955 after the breakup of the Johnson-Forest Tendency. This pamphlet also published for the first time her 1953 letters on Hegel's absolutes. See 'Extracts from Lenin's Notebooks (First English Translation)', *Philosophic Notes* (Detroit: News and Letters, 1955), also included in Dunayevskaya 1981–9, pp. 2431–2466.

39 Marcuse in Dunayevskaya 1988 [1958], p. xix.

40 Marcuse in Dunayevskaya 1988 [1958], p. xxiii.

41 Dunayevskaya 1988 [1958], p. 40.

she connects to 'the humanism and dialectic of *Capital*'.⁴² In the second half of the book she discusses the collapse of the Second International, Lenin and the Russian Revolution, and the phenomenon of Stalinism under the category 'Russian State Capitalism vs. Workers Revolt'.⁴³ Throughout, she conceptualises these new forms of revolt within a humanist, subject-centred concept of Marxism.

A key chapter taking up Lenin's Hegel Notebooks is entitled 'The Collapse of the Second International and the Break in Lenin's Thought'. Dunayevskaya writes that prior to World War I, Lenin and other Russian Marxists looked to the German Social Democracy for leadership but were shocked by the German party's 'betrayal' of its previous anti-war stance by its 1914 vote for war credits in the Reichstag. Lenin's Hegel Notebooks were an attempt on his part to conceptualise the reasons for this betrayal and to reorganise his own thinking, since critique of the SPD had to become also self-critique for his having followed their leadership for so long: 'What were the *objective* causes of such total ideological collapse? ... Confronted with the appearance of counter-revolution *within* the revolutionary movement, Lenin was driven to search for a philosophy that would reconstitute his own reason. He began reading Hegel's *Science of Logic*. It formed the philosophic foundation for the great divide in Marxism. His *Philosophical Notebooks* show how completely he reorganised his conception of the relationship between the materialistic or economic forces, and the human, subjective forces, the relationship between science and human activity'.⁴⁴ In this sense, Lenin's Hegel Notebooks were his most important intellectual turning point, one that separated the pre-1914 Lenin from the leader of the Russian Revolution and the author of major theoretical works such as *Imperialism* and *State and Revolution*.

Dunayevskaya writes that at the beginning of his study of Hegel, Lenin was interested in the category of self-movement but also very suspicious of Hegel's idealism, vowing to read him materialistically. This later changed, she argues, and by 'the *end* of the Hegelian studies' Lenin writes instead of 'intelligent idealism'.⁴⁵ In the heyday of the Second International – and this applies also to Lenin – the concept of dialectics was little more than a phrase and was essentially Kantian rather than Hegelian in its basic conception: 'The concept of contradiction was that of two units existing *alongside* of one another. The conception of opposition had not gone beyond Kant's dualism – as if Hegel had

42 Dunayevskaya 1988 [1958], p. 103.

43 Dunayevskaya 1988 [1958], p. 215.

44 Dunayevskaya 1988 [1958], p. 168.

45 Ibid.

never destroyed it with the conception that every single thing is itself a contradiction, is the basis of all movement'.⁴⁶ Lenin's new concept of dialectic placed, as he put it, 'the unity of opposites' as 'the kernel of the dialectic'.⁴⁷

Dunayevskaya argues that the Hegel Notebooks were a break with Lenin's earlier work, 'nothing short of a restoration of truth to philosophic idealism against vulgar materialism to which he had given the green light in 1908 with his work on *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*'.⁴⁸ She interprets his statement that 'it is impossible to grasp Marx's *Capital*' without having studied 'the *whole* of Hegel's *Logic*' and its corollary that 'none of the Marxists for the past half a century have understood Marx' as not only a sharp attack on Plekhanov, the leading philosopher of Russian Marxism, but also a self-critique: 'With himself, he is as merciless [as with Plekhanov], giving no quarter, not even in the economic field'.⁴⁹

His study of Hegel, she argues, helped Lenin to reconceptualise his economic and political theory. Before 1914 Lenin had accepted the arguments of Marxist economists such as Hilferding, whose *Finance Capital* traced the centralisation of capital in an essentially gradualist, evolutionary fashion: 'Now [in 1916], however, Lenin treats monopoly not so much as a part of a continuous development, but as a development through contradiction, through *transformation into opposite*. Competition was transformed into its opposite, monopoly'.⁵⁰ It was out of this transformed capitalism, monopoly capitalism, that imperialism arose, Lenin argued. Furthermore, writes Dunayevskaya: 'Just as competition was transformed into its opposite, monopoly, a part of the proletariat was transformed into its opposite, the aristocracy of labor'.⁵¹ In this sense, for Dunayevskaya, Lenin's concepts of monopoly capitalism, imperialism, and the aristocracy of labour form a dialectical whole, a whole that Lenin conceptualised in strict relationship to his study of Hegel's *Science of Logic*.

All this, argues Dunayevskaya, sheds new light on Lenin's concept of national liberation and his fight over this issue with his Bolshevik colleague Bukharin. She writes that all Lenin's post-1914 writings are 'permeated with the dialectic', including his 'Will', where Lenin criticises Bukharin for failing to understand the dialectic. Dunayevskaya holds that this harks back to their dispute in 1916–17 on self-determination, when Bukharin wrote that slogans of national lib-

46 Dunayevskaya 1988 [1958], p. 170.

47 Ibid.

48 Dunayevskaya 1988 [1958], p. 171.

49 Ibid.

50 Dunayevskaya 1988 [1958], p. 170, emphasis added.

51 Dunayevskaya 1988 [1958], p. 171.

eration are utopian and harmful in the era of capitalist imperialism because the absorption of smaller states by larger ones is inevitable. Thus for Bukharin, internationalism, not nationalism, is the revolutionary answer to war and imperialism.

It is this very position that Lenin attacked sharply as 'imperialist economism'.⁵² He instead hailed the Irish national revolt then taking place. Dunayevskaya ties this to the question of dialectics, in the sense that for Lenin, imperialism is a 'unity of opposites' that not only strengthens capitalism but also engenders new subjective forces: 'Bukharin was entirely blind to the fact that the dialectics of the revolution itself was at stake in the theoretical debate ... *Lenin was searching for new beginnings which would determine the end*, and he found these in two directions: (1) the struggle of national groupings for independence, and (2) the very stratification of the working class'.⁵³ To Dunayevskaya, Bukharin's concept of imperialism lacks such a dialectical view, one that Lenin worked out in relationship to his earlier Hegel studies. In dismissing the national question, Dunayevskaya writes, Bukharin anticipated not the next revolutionary wave but rather Stalin's chauvinistic policies toward national minorities in the Soviet Union.

A chapter entitled 'Forms of Organisation' takes up changes in Lenin's view of organisation and spontaneity from *What Is To Be Done?* to *State and Revolution*. Although Dunayevskaya critiques the former work, she does not dismiss it in the same way as she does *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*. At the same time, however, she strongly suggests that *State and Revolution*, written after Lenin's Hegel studies, is the more representative one. Her discussion of *State and Revolution* begins with a long quotation from Hegel's *Science of Logic*. She argues that it was with his 'mind working dialectically',⁵⁴ after 1914, that Lenin began to study Marx's writings anew, especially those on the Paris Commune. In addition, under the impact of the events of the spring of 1917, including the reestablishment of the soviets by the workers, Lenin was able to work out the concepts of direct democracy that he elaborates theoretically in *State and Revolution*. There, she writes, 'Lenin now saw that the need of his time was to *destroy bureaucracy*'.⁵⁵

Dunayevskaya accomplishes two things in her discussion: (1) She conceptualises Lenin's Hegel Notebooks as a break in his philosophical thought, sharply different from *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*. (2) She draws from this break

52 See Chapter 5 for a more detailed discussion of Lenin's concept of national liberation.

53 Dunayevskaya 1988 [1958], p. 175; emphasis added.

54 Dunayevskaya 1988 [1958], p. 187.

55 Dunayevskaya 1988 [1958], p. 191.

the political and economic consequences for the subsequent development of his concepts of imperialism, national liberation, and the state and revolution. Aside from the largely unpublished efforts of the Johnson-Forest Tendency a decade earlier, no one had yet discussed Lenin's Hegel Notebooks in such a broad context. Previous discussions, even sympathetic ones by Lukács and Lefebvre, tended to view the Hegel Notebooks in isolation from Lenin's major political and economic works. The publication for the first time of parts of Lenin's Hegel Notebooks as an appendix to *Marxism and Freedom*, notebooks at that time virtually unknown in the English-speaking world, also helped to focus attention on this new analysis of Lenin. The publisher was a small one, however, and in the McCarthyite 1950s, the few reviews the book did get in the United States were not in leading academic or intellectual journals.⁵⁶

The book received a more serious response in Britain, where most of the reviews stressed the new interpretation of Lenin centring on the Hegel Notebooks. An anonymous reviewer argued in the *Times Literary Supplement* as follows: 'The most original and at the same time most controversial part of Mrs. Dunayevskaya's book is her treatment of Lenin. She includes in translation a section of Lenin's Philosophical Notebooks ... and represents it as a fundamental turning point in Lenin's thought'.⁵⁷ The reviewer writes that although something 'can be made of this argument', there had always been various strands in Lenin's thought, ranging from the advocacy of 'disciplined party organisation' to near 'anarchism'. Instead of tracing the radical democracy of *State and Revolution* to Lenin's Hegel studies, as did Dunayevskaya, the reviewer argues that 'the extreme anti-state attitude' found there need not be connected to the Hegel Notebooks but can be attributed solely 'to the shock experienced by Lenin in 1914' when the German SPD backed the war and 'logically embraced what was to Lenin the spurious conception of state socialism'. Another, more sympathetic review was written by Eric Heffer, a member of the left wing of the Labour party. Heffer wrote that one conclusion flowing from the book was

56 See the review by Fred Thompson in *The Industrial Worker* (17 March 1958), organ of the anarcho-syndicalist Industrial Workers of the World. Thompson's review, while generally sympathetic, complained that 'the author is steeped in the Hegelian dialectic, and has long passages written with a foggiess that only Hegelians can achieve'. It was also discussed in *News & Letters*, the newspaper that Dunayevskaya helped to found. The type of discussion on Lenin prevalent in American academic circles in this period can be seen in the ex-Communist Bertram Wolfe's poorly documented article on Lenin and Hegel, which argues that the link between the two lay in their mutual glorification of warfare and violence. Wolfe's article combined American empiricist hostility to Hegel with a Cold-War type attack on Marxism and revolution. See Wolfe 1956, pp. 190–7.

57 'Marx's Heirs and Antecedents', *Times Literary Supplement*, 21 August 1959.

that socialists needed 'to get down to a serious study of Hegelian dialectics, to once again study Hegel, as Lenin did when the Socialist movement fell apart in the crisis of 1914', in order to overcome what he saw as an equally serious crisis in socialist thought in the conservative 1950s.⁵⁸ The philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre, then still a student, wrote in another review that the book presents a 'framework for a revaluation of Lenin in which a change can be noted' from an early emphasis on vanguardist manipulation to a subsequent greater focus on 'spontaneity', arguing further that 'this change goes along with what we may call Lenin's Hegelian conversion'.⁵⁹ Thus, *Marxism and Freedom* began to put the issue of Lenin's Hegel Notebooks onto the agenda of radical theory in the English-speaking world on the eve of the 1960s.

In 1961 an official Moscow-based English edition of Lenin's *Philosophical Notebooks* finally appeared, which, as with all such editions, mixed the Hegel Notebooks together with much additional material. The *Philosophical Notebooks*, in a translation by the Anglo-Indian Communist Clemens Dutt, appeared not as a separate book, as it had in German and French, but as Volume 38 of the forty-five-volume edition of Lenin's *Collected Works*, something that did not do much to alter what was still the work's relative obscurity in the English-speaking world. The American Communist philosopher Howard Selsam commented on the notebooks at several points in the early 1960s. In a 1963 article for the journal *Studies on the Left*, Selsam hints at some differences between *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* and the Hegel Notebooks when he describes the former work as imbued by 'Lockean sensationalism'.⁶⁰ Nevertheless, Selsam is also careful to distance himself from Hegel, arguing that in 1914–15 Lenin also read Aristotle after he 'became suspicious that Hegel was suppressing the materialist features of Aristotle's critique of Plato'.⁶¹ There is some gen-

58 Eric S. Heffer, review of *Marxism and Freedom*, *The Socialist Leader*, 13 September 1958.

59 MacIntyre 1958. In France Rubel discussed *Marxism and Freedom* in a review essay, 'Idéologie et Politique' (Rubel 1960, pp. 191–7). Rubel, too, focuses on Dunayevskaya's treatment of Lenin, but he attacks it sharply, taking issue with what he terms her attempt 'to reconcile Lenin's theory and practical politics with the humanist teachings of the young Marx'. He writes that this is achieved 'at the price of a naive obliteration of the Leninist idea of the role of the party and its leaders as a personification of the dictatorship of the proletariat' (p. 195).

60 Selsam 1963, p. 45. See also Selsam 1962. During this period Selsam and Harry Martel edited a collection entitled *Reader in Marxist Philosophy* (Selsam and Martel 1963), which contained substantial selections from Lenin's Hegel Notebooks in an appendix. Another appendix was devoted to the writings of the young Marx. Almost all the 'main' selections, however, were drawn from the mature Marx, from Engels, and from Lenin's *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*.

61 Selsam 1963, p. 52.

eral appreciation here of Lenin's debt to Hegel and of Hegel's importance to Marxist thought. Unlike in Dunayevskaya's work, however, no connections are drawn between Lenin's Hegel Notebooks and his later political and economic theory, and there is no concept of a break between the notebooks and Lenin's earlier work.

During the 1960s Dunayevskaya continued to work on Lenin's Hegel Notebooks as part of her *Philosophy and Revolution* (1973), where they are treated more extensively. She made many notes and drafts during this period, including some fairly lengthy ones that went through the Hegel Notebooks systematically.⁶² There was little other discussion of Lenin and Hegel in the United States in the 1960s,⁶³ but this was to change in the 1970s, as many different types of Hegelian and Western Marxism began to be debated hotly by the leftist intellectuals from the 1960s generation.

3 Italy in the 1950s and 1960s: The Critique of Lucio Colletti

In 1958 Lenin's *Philosophical Notebooks* appeared in an Italian edition from one of that country's most important publishing houses, the independent leftist publisher Feltrinelli Editore.⁶⁴ This first Italian edition also carried a wide-ranging 150-page introduction entitled 'Marxism and Hegel', which was written by a young Communist philosopher, Lucio Colletti. Colletti's lengthy introduction was reprinted a decade later as the first part of his best-known book, *Marxism and Hegel*.⁶⁵ Colletti had written an academic thesis on Benedetto Croce and Hegel, but by his own account he was converted to Marxism by the study of Lenin's work, particularly *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*.⁶⁶

62 See especially Dunayevskaya 1967. See also her notes and draft chapters on Lenin and Hegel for *Philosophy and Revolution*, in Dunayevskaya 1981–9, pp. 4261–68, 12528–606, 13210–29.

63 One exception is the brief article by Martin Glaberman, a colleague of C.L.R. James (Glaberman 1969), which counterposes Lenin's Hegel Notebooks and the work of the young Marx to Althusser's 'return to bourgeois rationalism, to an approximation of ordinary scientific method' (Glaberman 1969, p. 23).

64 Lenin 1958.

65 Colletti 1969. Only the second part of this work, which did not include Colletti's introduction to the *Philosophical Notebooks*, appeared in English as his *Marxism and Hegel* (Colletti 1973).

66 On this point, see Jay 1984, which contains the most thorough overview in English of Colletti's work. See also Smith 1986.

Unlike Gramsci's Hegelian Marxism, which included an interest in Lenin's writings on Hegel, Colletti's writings, along with those of his mentor, Galvano Della Volpe, represent a counterattack by scientific and materialist Marxism against Hegelianism within Marxism. Colletti's introduction to Lenin's *Philosophical Notebooks* does not directly discuss Lenin's relation to Hegel very much, concentrating instead on an attack on Hegelian Marxism in general. He criticises 'the interpretation of Hegel' advanced from the left to the effect that there is 'a (presumed) contradiction in the philosophy of Hegel between the *principles* (revolutionary) and the *conclusions* (conservative)'.⁶⁷ When he takes up Marx, he concentrates on the 1843 critique of Hegel's political philosophy rather than the more substantial and arguably more Hegelian 1844 'Critique of the Hegelian Dialectic'. By so doing, he is able to present Marx's thought as focussing on economics and sociology rather than philosophy.

Even the very brief twenty-page section of his introduction entitled 'Lenin and Hegel' does not really discuss Lenin's Hegel Notebooks as much as might be expected, concentrating instead on Lenin's earlier writings on Hegel, which, a bit closer to Colletti's own view, tend to be more critical and dismissive of Hegel's idealism. He takes up the young Lenin's dismissal of Hegel in his pamphlet *What the Friends of the People Are* (1894). Colletti writes that this attack on Hegel shows that 'an investigation of society that is limited only to *ideological* relations implies an elusion of the *real* object' and that what is needed instead is a materialistic focus that would 'make a *science* of society'.⁶⁸ Such a focus would be 'a materialism that finishes and discharges without mythological residues in the concrete investigation of science'.⁶⁹ This materialist conception of history is, Colletti argues, rooted in those of Marx's 'works that we call sociological',⁷⁰ works totally opposed to Hegelian Marxism's 'idealist and theologising historicism'.⁷¹ The reference to historicism is probably an attack on Gramsci. Colletti does not dismiss the young Marx altogether, however. He points, for example, to the concept of alienation and of the unity of the human being with nature found in Marx's 1844 *Manuscripts*.

When Colletti comes to Lenin's *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*, he writes that this is a 'much more complex work than it seems at first sight'.⁷² Following

67 Colletti 1969, p. 89. I would like to express my thanks to the late Margaret Crociani, a long-time activist in the labour movement in Milan, for translating part of this work for me.

68 Colletti 1969, p. 155.

69 Colletti 1969, p. 156.

70 Colletti 1969, p. 159.

71 Colletti 1969, p. 160.

72 Colletti 1969, p. 162.

Della Volpe's view that Marx's dialectic is more in the tradition of Galileo than of Hegel,⁷³ Colletti writes that in this book, Lenin argues – in Colletti's view correctly – for an 'experimental, dialectical method'.⁷⁴ Linking dialectical method directly to the method of experimental science in this way is a very Engelsian concept. To Lenin, Colletti writes, the natural scientist is a dialectician without knowing it.

Colletti makes one criticism of Lenin at this point, however. Although Lenin does present us with a theory of matter, Colletti holds that *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* lacks 'a real and precise theory of scientific laws'.⁷⁵ He arrives at this conclusion because he thinks that Lenin is too dismissive of the issues raised by the neo-Kantian philosophers of empiriocriticism, and therefore 'Lenin does not see (or does not get to the bottom of) the reciprocal relation of reason and matter'.⁷⁶ Colletti does not advocate going toward a philosophy of praxis, however, something that he dismisses, attacking Gramsci directly. Gramsci is partly responsible, Colletti writes, for the fact that we have a 'decomposition' of Marxism into 'metaphysical materialism on the one hand, and the Hegelian dialectic on the other'.⁷⁷

It is at this point that Colletti finally comes to Lenin's Hegel Notebooks, where he sees this same decomposition of Marxism at work: 'This judgment becomes confirmed in our opinion, at least in part, from the study of the *Philosophical Notebooks*'.⁷⁸ He is 'perplexed'⁷⁹ by Lenin's statement that he is reading Hegel materialistically. How can this be, Colletti writes, when all Hegel's central categories are essentially theological ones? He argues that this problem arose with Engels, who simply tried to apply Hegel's idealist dialectic to the material world.

To Colletti, a closely related problem in the Hegel Notebooks is that by fully supporting there all of Hegel's attacks on Kant, plus identifying strongly with the Hegelian concept of fluidity, Lenin is substituting for Kantianism 'a dialectic that is *outside space and time*'.⁸⁰ This critique seems to prefigure Colletti's move in the 1970s away from Marx and toward Kant. Here and elsewhere in his work Colletti avoids confronting the frequently made argument that it is

73 On this point, see Jay 1984.

74 Colletti 1969, p. 163.

75 Colletti 1969, p. 164.

76 Colletti 1969, p. 165.

77 Ibid.

78 Ibid.

79 Colletti 1969, p. 166.

80 Colletti 1969, p. 167.

Hegel's philosophy, not Kant's, that is the more deeply rooted in history, as is seen especially in the *Phenomenology of Mind*.⁸¹

Colletti seizes briefly on the fact that Lenin in his notes on Aristotle seems to defend the latter against Plato's idealism, but he concludes that even this does not solve the central issue posed by the Hegel Notebooks: 'However that may be, it is absolutely superfluous to underline that the assessment of Hegel in the *Notebooks* is quite a distance from the assessment that Lenin makes in 1894 at the time of the *Friends of the People* and other writings which I cited ... Twenty-five years later, for Lenin at the end of his life, [Hegel] has become so innate and fundamental to Marxism that he urges that Hegel studies flourish again, and that clubs be founded for the study of the *Science of Logic* ... The problem discussed here has still to be analysed'.⁸² In this sense, Colletti faces honestly the dilemma of aligning oneself with Lenin's thought while at the same time repudiating Hegel. He solves the dilemma by distancing himself from the Hegel Notebooks. On the other hand, in this introduction to their first Italian edition, he has hardly presented a comprehensive analysis of Lenin's Hegel Notebooks. In fact, those notebooks get relatively little discussion in his introduction. The question of their possible links to Lenin's major post-1914 writings is not even posed.

In 1968, by this time having left the Italian Communist party, Colletti returns to his critique of Lenin's reading of Hegel. He does so in an article attacking Marcuse's *Reason and Revolution*, where he implicitly links Lenin's reading of Hegel to that of Marcuse.⁸³ Colletti's critique here, however, is no more a wholesale repudiation of Lenin than was his earlier one in 1958, for during the same period he also wrote, as discussed in Chapter 6, a glowing tribute to *State and Revolution*.⁸⁴

In 1969 Colletti published the lengthy book *Il marxismo e Hegel*, the first part of which reprints his 1958 introduction to the Hegel Notebooks. In the second half of this work Colletti once again makes some very sharp attacks on Hegel, whom he links to romanticism, irrationalism, and reaction. He takes up a passage in the Hegel Notebooks where Lenin seems to embrace Hegel's concept of movement and self-movement,⁸⁵ a discussion of a part of the *Science of Logic* entitled 'The Law of Contradiction'. Here he reproaches Lenin for ignor-

81 On this point, see especially Hyppolite's essay on Hegel and the French Revolution in Hyppolite 1969 [1955].

82 Colletti 1969, p. 169.

83 See 'From Hegel to Marcuse', in Colletti 1972, pp. 111–40.

84 See 'Lenin's State and Revolution', in Colletti 1972, pp. 219–27.

85 *cw* 38:141.

ing that a bit further into this same passage, Hegel mentions the 'ontological proof of the existence of God'.⁸⁶ According to Colletti, Hegel's whole discussion is not really about self-movement but about God, something he accuses Lenin of ignoring: 'The "reading" given by Lenin of these pages rests, as one can see, on a basic misinterpretation. He "tried" to read Hegel "materialistically" precisely at the place where the latter was ... negating matter'.⁸⁷ Colletti writes further that such a reading, in which he also claims that Lenin follows Engels, 'meant a lapse of attention wherever Hegel talks about God'.⁸⁸ Stripped to its essentials, Colletti is making a rather crude argument here: since Hegel's philosophical categories were in some respects rooted in religious ones, Hegel was therefore a religious, irrationalist philosopher. This ignores the historical, philosophical, and critical dimensions of Hegel's thought, which were the focus not only of Hegelian Marxists but also of Marx himself.

Colletti also attacks what he views as Lukács's errors in interpretation in *The Young Hegel*, linking Lukács's standpoint to that of Lenin: 'This is basically the same point of view that we have also found in Lenin. Both celebrate Hegel's "dialectic of matter", convinced that it is a genuine materialism. They discard, however "God, the Absolute, the Pure Idea, etc". as if all of that were just a "façade". ... They thereby impute to Hegel the radical inconsistency of having produced a philosophy of "idealism-materialism"'.⁸⁹ Besides the previously mentioned general problems in the interpretation of Hegel's work, there are two other problems with respect to Colletti's argument here. First, as we have seen earlier, Lenin does not completely discard Hegel's absolute idea but instead writes toward the end of his notebooks that the absolute idea chapter of the *Science of Logic* 'scarcely says a word about God' and 'contains nothing at all that is specifically idealism'.⁹⁰ It is at an earlier stage in the Hegel Notebooks, before he read the absolute idea chapter, that Lenin writes that he is being careful to reject idealism, God, and the absolute in Hegel. Colletti does not mention that by the end of his reading, Lenin is stressing that the 'essence of Hegel's logic is the *dialectical method*' and that 'in this *most idealistic* of Hegel's works there is the *least* idealism and the *most materialism*'.⁹¹ In this sense, Colletti should have seen Lenin's position as being worse than that of Lukács, since Lukács tends to dismiss Hegel's absolute idea as mystical and religious, as does Col-

86 SL 442.

87 Colletti 1973, p. 25. Ellipsis in the original.

88 Colletti 1973, p. 25.

89 Colletti 1973, pp. 60–1.

90 CW 38:234.

91 CW 38:234.

letti. Second, and more important, the charge of 'idealism-materialism' could be made equally against the young Marx, who, as we have seen, writes in the 1844 *Manuscripts* that his own standpoint is one of 'a thoroughgoing Naturalism or Humanism [that] distinguishes itself from both Idealism and Materialism and is at the same time, the truth uniting both'.⁹² In his discussions of the young Marx, Colletti tends to avoid this issue, and even the entire essay from which it is drawn, the 'Critique of the Hegelian Dialectic'.⁹³

In other passages in *Marxism and Hegel* Colletti once again praises what he regards as the more empirical and scientific stance of *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*. He also claims that Lenin is less critical of Kant in this work than in the Hegel Notebooks. Whereas in the former book Lenin implies some links between Kant and materialism, Colletti argues that he moves away from such a view in the latter: "This very position is entirely abandoned in the *Notebooks*, where Lenin is always, or almost always, in agreement with Hegel against Kant".⁹⁴ In his most scathing attack against Lenin, he writes: 'In his *Philosophical Notebooks*, Lenin uncritically adheres to and takes over Hegel's destruction of the intellect and of the principle of non-contradiction; to the point of reinventing for himself the very formulae of Bergson's spiritualist irrationalism ... what is set forth is, in point of fact, a collection of all the most representative themes of vitalist irrationalism, in the illusory belief that they are a new and higher form of materialism'.⁹⁵ In this passage Colletti also links Lenin's stance in the Hegel Notebooks to the German sociologist Georg Simmel's 'theme that "Life" cannot be grasped, is *unbegreiflich*, by thought because it is contradiction, unity of opposites and therefore totality, whereas thought, or at least the *Verstandsbegriffe* (intellectual concepts) are one-sided and incomplete concepts, unable thus to "know the pure essence of cosmic life"'.⁹⁶ In this sense, Colletti continues and sharpens his 1958 critique of the Hegel Notebooks.

Colletti's position, unlike that of Althusser, which I will discuss in a moment, has at least the virtue of consistency. He does not flinch from attacking Lenin's Hegel Notebooks where he sees them diverging from a scientific materialist position, thus pointing implicitly to what I have argued for in this study: a break in Lenin's thought after 1914. The biggest problem is that Colletti's version of scientific materialism, being essentially uncritical and undialectical, is thus

92 Marx, 'Critique of the Hegelian Dialectic', p. 313.

93 See, for example, Colletti's lengthy introduction to the *New Left Review*-sponsored edition *Karl Marx: Early Writings* (Marx 1975), pp. 7–56.

94 Colletti 1973, p. 84.

95 Colletti 1973, p. 163.

96 Colletti 1973, p. 163.

opposed not only to Lenin's Hegelianism but also to Marx's own concept of dialectic. I take up some of these issues in my critique of Althusser's reading of the Hegel Notebooks. In many respects, however, Althusser's position parallels that of Colletti.

By the 1970s Colletti, recognising that his own form of scientific materialism was incompatible not only with Hegelian Marxism but also with the Hegelian foundation of even Marx's mature work, moved to an anti-Marxist, neo-Kantian position. At the same time, he gave up his earlier far left positions on political issues that in the 1960s had enabled him to extol the concept of revolutionary democracy in *State and Revolution*, contrasting it to what he considered to be the limited nature of bourgeois democracy.⁹⁷

4 Western Marxism in Postwar Germany: Iring Fetscher

Given the great interest of the West German intellectuals and student activists of the 1960s in Hegelian Marxism, one might have expected some extensive discussion there of Lenin's Hegel Notebooks. Nonetheless, both the older Frankfurt School intellectuals and the younger New Left theorists of the student movement tended to dismiss or ignore Lenin's writings, including those on Hegel. This was true even after the student movement revived discussion on key Hegelian Marxist works from the 1920s and afterward, including the writings of Adorno, Horkheimer, Lukács, Korsch, Bloch, Marcuse, Lefebvre, and many others. In much of this period, however, the only German edition of Lenin's *Philosophical Notebooks* in print was an East German one with a picture of Stalin on the cover, which probably did not help to generate interest in this text among independent leftists in West Germany.⁹⁸

First-generation Critical Theorists Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer did not take up Lenin's Hegel Notebooks, nor did their most prominent student, Jürgen Habermas. Another one of their students, Oskar Negt, who was considered to be further to the left than Habermas and who enjoyed some influence in the student movement, did edit a collection of Soviet philosophical writings from the 1920s, but Negt's collection, issued in 1969 by Suhrkamp Verlag, the most important publisher of Marxist and radical theory, included nothing from or on Lenin's Hegel Notebooks and concentrated instead on the debate between the Deborinists and the mechanists.⁹⁹ Negt gave his lengthy

97 For a discussion, see Jay 1984.

98 Lenin 1949 [1932].

99 Deborin and Bukharin 1969.

introduction a rather tendentious title: 'Marxism as a Science of Legitimation: On the Genesis of Stalinist Philosophy'. This introduction does not even mention Lenin's writings on Hegel or the debate over them. During this period, another second-generation Critical Theorist, Alfred Schmidt, wrote the introduction to a new edition of Pannekoek's *Lenin as Philosopher*, an edition that includes Korsch's sharp 1938 attack on the Hegel Notebooks.¹⁰⁰

One exception to this tendency to dismiss Lenin's Hegel Notebooks was the work of the Marxist Humanist Iring Fetscher, who wrote widely on Hegel and Marx from the 1950s onward and who taught philosophy and sociology first in Tübingen and later at Frankfurt University. In the 1950s Fetscher, who wrote a doctoral thesis on the concept of humanism in Hegel's *Philosophy of Mind*, helped to launch discussion of the writings of Hegel and the young Marx among a new generation of intellectuals. He was an editor of the journal *Marxismusstudien*, the first independent German intellectual journal devoted to Marxist studies since 1933. He frequently polemicised against Soviet and East German distortions of Marx's work from a Marxist Humanist standpoint. A major essay on Marx and Hegel published by Fetscher in 1960, while closer to the perspective of Lukács's *History and Class Consciousness* than to Lenin's work, nonetheless gives a serious reading to Lenin's Hegel Notebooks.¹⁰¹

Fetscher makes several general critiques of Lenin's work before taking up the notebooks. He writes that the major error of orthodox Marxism, which in his view includes even the best work of both Engels and Lenin, was to interpret the Hegelian-Marxian dialectic as a 'universal scientific key to all philosophical and political problems, which – like modern natural science – could provide the basis for infallible practical results and become a reliable "tool" in the hands of a competent minority of "specialists"'.¹⁰² According to Fetscher, this led to several other problems. First, he writes that Lenin's concept of the vanguard party is 'an undialectical interpretation of the relationship between the party and proletariat'.¹⁰³ Second, Lenin 'interprets the relationship idealistically and elevates the party (theory) as the overriding and all-embracing factor'.¹⁰⁴ Third, Lenin's reflection theory in *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*

100 Elsewhere Alfred Schmidt did refer to Lenin's statement in the Hegel Notebooks that, although Marx did not leave a logic in the traditional sense, he did leave the logic of *Capital*. See his 'Zum Erkenntnisbegriff der politischen Ökonomie', in Euchner and Schmidt (eds.) 1968, p. 43.

101 Fetscher 1960, pp. 66–169. This was published in English as the key essay in Fetscher 1971.

102 Fetscher 1971, p. 42.

103 Ibid.

104 Fetscher 1971, p. 43.

and his 'one-sided emphasis on "materialism"' led to 'an undialectical epistemology'.¹⁰⁵ Fetscher also attacks sharply the mechanistic, positivist Marxism of Second International theoreticians such as Kautsky and Hilferding, a problem he traces to Engels's 'having amalgamated in a rather confused manner'¹⁰⁶ Hegelian and positivist concepts. This amalgamation led to a situation where, after Engels, 'the Hegelian components are soon completely lost'¹⁰⁷ to Marxism, a trend that was taken over and vulgarised still further under Stalinism.

As regards Lenin, however, Fetscher writes: 'In comparison with the ideologists of the Second International, Lenin established fresh links between Marxism and Hegel'.¹⁰⁸ He cites Lenin's famous aphorism on the relationship of Hegel's *Science of Logic* to Marx's *Capital*. To Fetscher, Lenin's interest in Hegel was greater than that of the Second International theorists, first of all because of his revolutionary views. A second reason for his interest was his desire, following Engels, to use 'Hegel's dialectics as a tool' for the 'maintenance and defense of materialism'.¹⁰⁹ Lenin's study of Hegel in 1914–15 was, to Fetscher, a serious grappling with Hegelian dialectics:

In his efforts to 'read' Hegel's logic and history of philosophy 'materialistically', Lenin constantly notes with astonishment the closeness between Hegel and materialism. However, at the same time he is impressed by the systematic unity and breadth of Hegel's thought, and perhaps secretly saw in him a model for a comprehensive, materialistic, dialectical philosophy ... Lenin therefore does not understand logic as a mere doctrine of subjective laws of thought but instead considers it as the law of development and movement behind all natural and spiritual [*geistigen*] things, the law of order and movement in the objective material world, and the law of subjective forms of consciousness.¹¹⁰

In this sense, Lenin has embraced significant aspects of the Hegelian dialectic.

For Fetscher, however, there are also some major limits to Lenin's concept of dialectic even in the Hegel Notebooks. One problem is that Lenin is still trapped in the essentially undialectical concept of the party to lead. Whereas 'the young Marx simply wanted to throw the spark of awareness (philosophy) into the

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Fetscher 1971, p. 63.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Fetscher 1971, p. 69.

¹⁰⁹ Fetscher 1971, p. 70.

¹¹⁰ Fetscher 1971, pp. 72–3.

midst of the proletariat'¹¹¹ to help them realise their position and begin revolutionary praxis, Lenin wants a leadership to guide the masses. Another problem is that Lenin's crude materialist reflection theory in *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* is pre-Kantian and lacks even that philosophy's 'critical standpoint'.¹¹² Fetscher has arrived at these two points by merging Lenin's early work on the vanguard party and on crude materialism with the post-1914 writings. He does not take up statements in the Hegel Notebooks such as the well-known one that 'cognition not only reflects the objective world, but creates it',¹¹³ which seems to go far beyond any crude reflection theory. Thus, Fetscher does not really pose the possibility of a break in Lenin's thought in 1914–15, as has been done, albeit in very different ways, by Lefebvre, Dunayevskaya, and Colletti.¹¹⁴

5 France in the 1960s and 1970s: Althusser, Garaudy, and Beyond

After 1960 another important group of discussions was that in France by Garaudy, Louis Althusser and his colleagues, and others who joined in the debate. Although Althusser remained a Communist party member until his death in 1990 after a decade of psychiatric care, some of his younger followers

111 Fetscher 1971, p. 73.

112 Fetscher 1971, p. 75.

113 CW 38:212.

114 By 1969 a West German edition of Lenin's Hegel Notebooks finally appeared, with a seventy-page introduction by Thomas Meyer, who had studied with Fetscher at Frankfurt University. See Lenin 1969. In his introduction Meyer argues on the one hand that Lenin's reading of Hegel is flawed because he created 'isolated aphorisms without consequence for the understanding of Hegelian texts' (p. 66) and because of his insistence on reading Hegel materialistically. On the other hand, Meyer finds that in his discussion of 'The Doctrine of the Notion', Lenin 'gives up the dogma of the pure objectivity of the real' and 'alludes to mediating relationships, from subject/object to praxis, in a manner which is similar to how these issues unfold in [Marx's 1844] Paris Manuscripts' (p. 70). The noted Marxist theorist Helmut Fleischer wrote a very dismissive review of this edition of the Hegel Notebooks for the fairly orthodox Marxist journal *Das Argument*, where he asked 'how one could, as a critical Marxist, keep company with a man like Lenin' (1974, p. 285). West German New Left leaders tended to be equally dismissive toward Lenin, even as they discussed appreciatively the Hegelian Marxism of Lukács and Korsch. See Rabeahl 1973, especially p. 307, and Dutschke 1974. There were also several more academic books that took up Lenin and Hegel: Ballestrem 1968, a survey of Marxist and Soviet thought; Grujic 1985, a fairly comprehensive discussion that, unfortunately, tends in its treatment of Lenin to merge together *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* and the Hegel Notebooks; Schaefer 1986, a generally dismissive and hostile book, but one that does have some discussion of aspects of Hegel's *Science of Logic* that Lenin skipped over.

joined Maoist groups in the 1960s. Better known in the English-speaking world for his notion of an 'epistemological break' between the writings of the young and the mature Marx and for his concept of 'ideological state apparatuses', Althusser also commented frequently on Lenin's work. Because Althusser's discussion of Lenin's relation to Hegel is the most serious and widely discussed counterargument to the main thrust of this study, I will devote considerable space to his arguments. Thus, my critique of Althusser is also a defence of the central arguments that I have made in this work, especially in Part 1.

Unlike Lefebvre, Althusser sought to separate Lenin from Hegel. That he was anxious to be known as an authority on Lenin as well as Marx is seen in the title of his third book on Marxist theory, *Lenine et la philosophie* (1969). When a much-expanded version of the book appeared in English two years later, he kept that title even though in the expanded version only two of the nine essays are devoted to Lenin. In fact, two of this book's other essays, one on Marx's *Capital* and the other on ideological state apparatuses, have evoked far more discussion than did his essays specifically on Lenin.

In his first book, *For Marx* (1965), Althusser exhibits a virulent antipathy not only to the writings of the young Marx but also to Hegel: 'Priority is given to one essential of any Marxist historical study: rigour, a rigorous conception of Marxist concepts ... what distinguished them once and for all from their phantoms. One phantom is more especially crucial than any other today: the shade of Hegel. To drive this phantom back into the night we need a little more light on Marx'.¹¹⁵ Such a notion of driving Hegel 'back into the night' shows Althusser as the most vehemently anti-Hegelian of any leading Marxist intellectual of the period.

Given such a view of Hegel's threat to Marxism, it should not be surprising that Althusser also had a very unusual reading of Lenin's relation to Hegel. In fact, his view of Lenin and Hegel downplayed almost completely Lenin's debt to Hegel, even in the 1914–15 Hegel Notebooks. In many respects, Althusser's work, like Colletti's, thus represents a counterattack on the more humanist and Hegelian Marxism that had begun to be articulated from the 1940s onward. He launched this counterattack on three fronts: (1) against the young Marx, (2)

¹¹⁵ Althusser 1970 [1965], p. 116. The book is a collection of essays first published in French journals in the early 1960s. The lines cited are drawn from the concluding paragraph of Althusser's essay, 'Contradiction and Over-Determination' (1962), one of the key essays in this volume. Elliott 1987 provides a detailed, sympathetic, but also critical overview in English of Althusser's work. Critiques of Althusser by Hegelian Marxists and Marxist Humanists are legion. See especially 'La Crise de l'humanisme dans le marxisme contemporain' (1968) in d' Hondt 1972, pp. 219–28; Dunayevskaya 1969, pp. 5, 7; Schmidt 1981 [1971]; O'Neill 1982.

against Marx's debt to Hegel, and (3) against Lenin's debt to Hegel. It is the third front that most concerns us here.

In an essay entitled 'On the Materialist Dialectic' (1963), later included in *For Marx*, Althusser discusses Lenin's Hegel Notebooks, implying that Lenin criticised Engels and Plekhanov for being too Hegelian. He writes that 'Lenin himself criticised Engels and Plekhanov for having "applied" the dialectic externally to "examples" from the natural sciences'.¹¹⁶ In a footnote to this sentence Althusser splices together two citations from Lenin's Hegel Notebooks. The first passage from Lenin that Althusser quotes states that 'Hegel's logic cannot be applied in its given form, it cannot be taken as given. One must separate out from it the logical (epistemological) nuances, after purifying them from *Ideenmystik* [mystical idealism]; that is still a big job'.¹¹⁷ The second passage he quotes reads: 'The correctness of this aspect of the content of dialectics [the "identity of opposites" (Althusser's note)] must be tested by the history of science. This aspect of dialectics (e.g., in Plekhanov) usually receives inadequate attention: the identity of opposites is taken as the sum-total of examples ("for example, a seed", "for example, primitive communism". The same is true of Engels. But it is "in the interests of popularisation ...") and not as a law of cognition (and as a law of the objective world)'.¹¹⁸ Althusser writes further that 'the external application of a concept is never equivalent to a theoretical practice'.¹¹⁹ He thus leads us to believe that Lenin wrote in the Hegel Notebooks that Plekhanov's and Engels's errors lay in rigidly applying Hegel's dialectic to phenomena.

Unfortunately for Althusser's argument, a closer inspection of the texts in question reveals that he has quoted Lenin entirely out of context. The first quotation from Lenin, to the effect that Hegel's logic cannot be applied in its given form, is not about Engels or Plekhanov at all but is a critique of Hegel's view of Greek philosophy drawn from Lenin's notes on Hegel's *History of Philosophy*.

Second, the previously quoted critique of Engels and Plekhanov, which Lenin made in the essay fragment 'On the Question of Dialectics' (1915), is hardly for too rigid a reliance on Hegel. To the contrary, Lenin reproaches them for quite a different reason. Let me quote the passage in question in full from Lenin's Hegel Notebooks:

¹¹⁶ Althusser 1970 [1965], p. 170.

¹¹⁷ Ibid; see also *cw* 38:266.

¹¹⁸ Ibid; see also *cw* 38:359.

¹¹⁹ Althusser 1970 [1965], p. 170.

The splitting of a single whole and the cognition of its contradictory parts (see the quotation from Philo on Heraclitus at the beginning of Section III, 'On cognition', in Lassalle's book on Heraclitus) is the *essence* (one of the 'essentials', one of the principal, if not the principal, characteristics of dialectics. That is precisely how Hegel, too, puts the matter (Aristotle in his *Metaphysics* continually *grapples* with it and *combats* Heraclitus and Heraclitean ideas).

The correctness of this aspect of the content of dialectics must be tested by the history of science. This aspect of dialectics (e.g., in Plekhanov) usually receives inadequate attention: the identity of opposites is taken as the sum-total of *examples* ('for example, a seed', 'for example, primitive communism'. The same is true of Engels. But it is 'in the interests of popularisation ...') and not as a *law of cognition* (and as a law of the objective world).¹²⁰

This passage is a bit opaque, especially because of its frequent (and sometimes unfinished) parentheses, but the first paragraph (which Althusser does not quote) begins with a discussion of the concept of contradiction as the 'essence ... of dialectics'. Lenin mentions several philosophers, but since Hegel is the one in question, it should be noted that Lenin writes that seeing contradiction as the essence of dialectics 'is precisely how Hegel, too, puts the matter'. From the overall context, there appears to be not a critique of Hegel but rather an appreciation of his concept of dialectic. In the second paragraph comes the critique of Engels and Plekhanov for giving this aspect of dialectics inadequate attention. Where then, is the critique of Hegel in this passage? Not only can it not be found, but the entire passage reads more plausibly as an appreciation of Hegel on dialectics and a critique of Engels and Plekhanov for not grasping the profundity of what Hegel had done, especially on the crucially important concept of contradiction.

This interpretation is borne out by another passage on Plekhanov in Lenin's Hegel Notebooks, this one also in his discussion of Hegel's *History of Philosophy*. Lenin writes: 'Plekhanov wrote probably nearly 1,000 pages on philosophy (dialectics) ... There is in them nil about the Larger Logic [Hegel's *Science of Logic*] *its* thoughts (i.e., dialectic *proper*, as philosophical science) nil!!'.¹²¹ Far from critiquing Plekhanov for applying Hegel too directly, Lenin attacks him for never

¹²⁰ CW 38:359.

¹²¹ CW 38:277.

seriously grappling with Hegel at all. Therefore, Althusser's reading of Lenin's text is shown once again to be a very problematic one indeed.

Unlike those who, like Lefebvre, have lamented Marx's failure to complete his projected 1858 essay on dialectics, Althusser writes that in *Capital*, Marx 'settled his relations with the Hegelian dialectic' and 'never took the time' to write the essay on dialectics because 'it was not essential to the development of his theory'.¹²² In support of this claim Althusser again quotes Lenin's Hegel Notebooks: 'If Marx did not leave behind him a "Logic" (with a capital letter) he did leave the logic of *Capital*, and this ought to be utilised to the full in this question'.¹²³ The problem with such an argument is that Lenin wrote this comment as part of what may have been an attempt to fill this gap, an extensive study of Hegel's *Logic*, a study in which he also wrote that it is 'impossible completely to understand' Marx's *Capital* 'without having thoroughly studied and understood the whole of Hegel's *Logic*'.¹²⁴ As we will see a bit later, however, Althusser manages in *Lenin and Philosophy* to read even this passage as a repudiation of Hegel.

Far from being uninterested in the category of contradiction, Althusser focuses on this category, writing that 'as Lenin said, the dialectic is the conception of the contradiction in the very essence of things'.¹²⁵ As I have already shown, however, he neglects to mention Lenin's acknowledged debt to Hegel on this very issue. Against what he perceives to be Hegelian abstractions, Althusser advocates the 'concreteness' of 'Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin and Mao'.¹²⁶ It is in fact Mao's essay 'On Contradiction' (1937) to which Althusser seems to be most indebted in his overall concept of contradiction. Despite the few previously cited references to minor texts in Lenin's Hegel Notebooks, throughout *For Marx* Althusser never discusses or even cites anything from the key text in Lenin's Hegel Notebooks, his 'Abstract of Hegel's *Science of Logic*'.

During the 1960s Roger Garaudy was the chief philosopher of the French Communist party and the editor of the French edition of Lenin's *Collected Works*. Especially after Lefebvre had been expelled, Garaudy was in many respects Althusser's theoretical rival within the party. Garaudy had by now moved away from his earlier crude materialism toward a more humanistic and Hegelian Marxism. In 1968 he published a small book, *Lenine*, that devoted considerable space to the Hegel Notebooks and that may have been at least in

122 Althusser 1970 [1965], p. 174.

123 Althusser 1970 [1965], p. 175; see also *cw* 38:319.

124 *cw* 38:180.

125 Althusser 1970 [1965], p. 217.

126 Althusser 1970 [1965], p. 206.

part in answer to Althusser, although the latter is never mentioned. In *Lenine* Garaudy writes that Hegel's *Logic* is the text that Lenin 'studied passionately in 1915',¹²⁷ in this way taking up Marx's own earlier concern with Hegel. Taking a position different from the pronouncements on the originality of Lenin's *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* that he had made during the party's attacks on Merleau-Ponty in 1955, Garaudy now writes that before 1914 Lenin 'held to the conceptions of Kautsky' with regard to 'defining the dialectic'.¹²⁸ Garaudy also writes that Lenin's Hegel Notebooks, as well as Marx's 1844 *Manuscripts*, 'had been excluded during Stalin's time ... because they were incompatible with a dogmatic interpretation of Marxism'.¹²⁹

Garaudy raises two major points on the originality of Lenin's Hegel Notebooks. (1) Unlike Lenin's *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* and its crude reflection theory, his 'profound reading of Hegel's *Science of Logic* permits Lenin to integrate Hegel's critique of immediacy into materialism'.¹³⁰ He also singles out Lenin's sharp critique of Plekhanov for criticising Kant in a 'vulgar' rather than in a 'dialectical' materialist manner, because, in Lenin's view, Plekhanov had never really taken up seriously Hegel's critique of Kant. (2) Garaudy writes that Lenin's reading of Hegel 'took Lenin to a re-evaluation of idealism' in the spirit of the young Marx,¹³¹ here suggesting also that both Lenin and Marx were far closer to Hegel than to Feuerbach. He quotes Lenin on the relationship of idealism and materialism: 'intelligent idealism is closer to intelligent materialism than stupid materialism'.¹³² For Garaudy, 'Lenin has profoundly assimilated the Hegelian conception of the dialectical rapport between the ideal and the real'.¹³³ Garaudy goes on to connect Lenin's new concept of dialectic developed during his Hegel studies to his book *Imperialism* (1916), writing that here 'the dialectic method is applied by Lenin to economic analysis'.¹³⁴ Like Dunayevskaya, he views Lenin's new concept of dialectic after 1914 as being at the root of Lenin's debate with Bukharin over the self-determination of nations. Unfortunately Garaudy develops these points only in a very schematic sense, without much detailed analysis of Lenin's writings, especially his Hegel Notebooks.

127 Garaudy 1968, p. 39. Translations are my own.

128 Ibid.

129 Garaudy 1968, p. 40.

130 Ibid.

131 Garaudy 1968, pp. 43–4.

132 Garaudy 1968, p. 45; see also *cw* 38:276.

133 Garaudy 1968, p. 49.

134 Garaudy 1968, p. 50.

That same tumultuous year, 1968, also saw Althusser's appearance as the featured speaker before the annual colloquium of the prestigious Société Française de Philosophie, where he delivered a paper entitled 'Lenin and Philosophy', published as a book the following year.¹³⁵ Here Althusser again takes up some of the themes discussed earlier, but focused on Lenin's *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* rather than the Hegel Notebooks. Yet Althusser's paper hardly repeats the wooden discussions of Lenin by Garaudy and other party ideologues in the 1950s. His paper rests more on a notion of a radical break with the very concept of philosophy than on a detailed exegesis of *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*.¹³⁶

Althusser begins by tracing French academic philosophy's reluctance for many years to take up not only Lenin but also leading thinkers who wrote in German such as Marx, Freud, Hegel, and even Kant. He also mentions, within France itself, 'the few great minds against which' academic philosophy 'set its face, like Comte and Durkheim'.¹³⁷ According to Althusser, academic philosophy is hostile to Marxism because (1) 'it cannot bear the idea that it might have something to learn from politics' and (2) 'it cannot bear the idea that philosophy might be the object of a theory, i.e., of an objective knowledge'.¹³⁸ Furthermore, 'philosophy has to recognise that it is not more than a certain investment of politics', and 'Lenin happens to have been the first to say so'.¹³⁹ This is a disarmingly elegant presentation of a crude and dogmatic concept from *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*, Lenin's notion of 'party-ness in philosophy', a notion to which Althusser returns at the end of his paper.

Adopting, as he did in his earlier writings, Gaston Bachelard's notion of an 'epistemological break', Althusser sees Marxism as 'the foundation of a new science'¹⁴⁰ based on an antiphilosophy reading of Marx's famous eleventh thesis on Feuerbach. This thesis reads: 'Philosophers have only interpreted the world

135 This paper and the critical responses to it by Paul Ricoeur, Jean Wahl, and Jean Hyppolite were published in the *Bulletin de la Société Française de Philosophie* 62, no. 4 (Oct.–Dec. 1968), pp. 127–81. Althusser's paper, without the critical responses, was soon published as a small book, *Lenine et la Philosophie* (Althusser 1969). The next year it was published in an English translation, again without the critical responses, together with seven other papers written by Althusser during the period 1968–71, most notably the much-discussed paper 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses', all under the title *Lenin and Philosophy, and Other Essays* (Althusser 1971).

136 I have taken up the central arguments and context of *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* in Chapter 1.

137 Althusser 1971, p. 28.

138 Althusser 1971, p. 32.

139 Althusser 1971, p. 33.

140 Althusser 1971, p. 40.

in various ways; the point is to change it'.¹⁴¹ Basing his argument on this thesis, Althusser opposes the notion of creating a Marxist philosophy at all, including the efforts by Lukács and Gramsci to create 'a philosophy, a post-Hegelian "philosophy of praxis"'.¹⁴² From here he moves to what he calls Lenin's 'great philosophical theses':¹⁴³ (1) that philosophy 'is not a science';¹⁴⁴ (2) that nonetheless 'there is a privileged link between philosophy and the sciences';¹⁴⁵ and (3) that philosophy is seen by Lenin (correctly in Althusser's view) as 'a struggle between materialism and idealism', which 'amounts to the claim that essentially philosophy has no history'.¹⁴⁶ Thus, despite the sophisticated theoretical presentation, we are back to the old Engelsian dogma of materialism versus idealism as the nodal point of Marxist theory.

If Althusser thus opposes any hint of idealism, this is accompanied by equally sharp attacks on empiricism, as he quotes Lenin's statement from *What Is to Be Done?* again and again: 'Without revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement'.¹⁴⁷ Althusser finds within Lenin's *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* his own concept of Marxist theory as 'anti-empiricism and anti-positivism'.¹⁴⁸ The problem with such a position is that it is called into question by Lenin's Hegel Notebooks, which *were* concerned with philosophy, and with Hegelian idealism in particular. In a curious reading of Lenin's philosophical practice, Althusser sees Lenin's chief contribution as an attempt 'to protect scientific practice against the assaults of idealist philosophy, the scientific against the assaults of the ideological'.¹⁴⁹ Finally we come again to the question of partyness in philosophy – for Althusser, the notion that 'all philosophy is partisan' in the centuries-old political struggle between materialism and idealism.¹⁵⁰ Once again, he refuses any notion of Marxism as a philosophy: 'Less than ever can we say that Marxism is a new philosophy: a philosophy of praxis. At the heart of Marxist theory, there is a science'.¹⁵¹ By taking part in the

141 Marx, 1976b, p. 5. As I discussed in Chapter 1, this thesis has usually been read as a rejection of philosophy, but it is not clear from the text that the second half of the sentence is really a critique of the first half.

142 Althusser 1971, p. 44.

143 Althusser 1971, p. 47.

144 Ibid.

145 Althusser 1971, p. 51.

146 Althusser 1971, p. 54–5.

147 Althusser 1971, p. 52.

148 Althusser 1971, p. 51.

149 Althusser 1971, p. 61.

150 Althusser 1971, p. 64.

151 Althusser 1971, pp. 67–8.

class struggle Marxism becomes 'not a (new) philosophy of praxis' but instead 'a (new) practice of philosophy'.¹⁵²

The glaring gap in this lengthy paper on Lenin and philosophy is that Lenin's Hegel Notebooks are barely mentioned and never seriously discussed. When it was read to the Société Française de Philosophie, that was precisely the issue raised from the floor by Hyppolite, in what was one of his last public appearances before his death that same year:

As to Lenin, I think that the *Philosophical Notebooks* are subsequent to the book against empirio-criticism; I am familiar above all with the *Philosophical Notebooks*, and it seems to me that the great admiration that Lenin shows for Hegel, the surprising manner in which he copies Hegel, is as surprising as the manner in which he copies Abel Rey with [writing] in the margin, 'shamefaced materialist, go away'. As for Hegel, he says things in the margins which are very profound: he remarks, with respect to the theory of essence, that he moves well [*va bien*] between the accidental and the essential, because between the deeper currents and the surface, the surface is very important for explaining things.¹⁵³

Althusser does not respond to this challenge directly but returns to the old, familiar tunes of partyness in philosophy and Marxism as science. The core of Lenin's contribution lies 'not at all in the book against empirio-criticism, nor in the *Philosophical Notebooks* ... it is in his texts studying Marx, in his work on economic analysis, and above all his political writings'.¹⁵⁴ At this juncture Althusser seems to have attempted to evade the issue of Lenin's relation to Hegel altogether, especially when one considers that it was in the Hegel Notebooks that Lenin wrote that one could not fully grasp Marx's chief economic work, *Capital*, without first having studied the whole of Hegel's *Logic*.

It was possibly to answer Hyppolite's critique that in 1969 Althusser wrote a short essay entitled 'Lenin before Hegel'.¹⁵⁵ This key essay begins with a brief

152 Althusser 1971, p. 68.

153 Hyppolite in Althusser 1968, pp. 171–2. Abel Rey was a French philosopher of science whose book Lenin read and annotated between 1908 and 1911, annotations that are included in the *Philosophical Notebooks*. The one Hyppolite is referring to on 'shamefaced materialism' is in CW 38, p. 461.

154 Althusser 1968, p. 174.

155 This essay was published in a curious sequence: first in Germany in 1970 in the *Hegel-Jahrbuch*, then in Althusser 1971, and then, finally, in France in 1972 in a second edition of Althusser 1969. In the discussion that follows I will include page references from 'Lenin before Hegel', from the English edition of Althusser's *Lenin and Philosophy*. For details on

synopsis of the paper given in 1968 to the Société Française de Philosophie. In an apparent effort to defend himself against charges that he had 'Althusserised' Lenin in this paper, he claims very modestly that 'all these theses can be found in *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*, either explicitly or implicitly. All I have done is to begin to make them more explicit'.¹⁵⁶

Since he is now writing on Lenin and Hegel, he cannot completely avoid the Lenin-Hegel relationship, as he had done in his 1968 lecture. But he can downplay the importance of Lenin's study of Hegel in the time-honoured fashion of the Stalinist editors who created the mélange called Lenin's *Philosophical Notebooks*, combining disparate texts from over two decades on issues relating to philosophy to cover up the Hegel Notebooks in a mass of extraneous material. Althusser begins by stressing that the brief notes (twelve pages) in Lenin's *Philosophical Notebooks* on Feuerbach were written 'before he read Hegel'. In this first move to distance Lenin from Hegel, he writes: 'Hence Lenin read Feuerbach *and* Hegel'.¹⁵⁷ Then he jumps all the way back to 1894, when, he claims, Lenin at the age of twenty-four dismissed Hegel's 'empty dialectical scheme'.¹⁵⁸ In fact, this quotation is not from Lenin at all but from Mikhailovsky, his opponent in 1894.¹⁵⁹ Althusser stresses that 'the best way to understand Hegel and the relation between Marx and Hegel is above all to have read and understood *Capital*', claiming that as early as 1894 Lenin had 'understood it better than anyone else ever had'.¹⁶⁰

Now Althusser is ready to take up one of the most difficult issues for his attempt to separate Lenin from Hegel, Lenin's famous statement in the Hegel Notebooks on the relation of Hegel's *Logic* to Marx's *Capital*. Althusser quotes this statement: 'Aphorism: it is impossible completely to understand Marx's *Capital*, and especially its first chapter, without having thoroughly studied and understood the whole of Hegel's *Logic*. Consequently, half a century later none of the Marxists understood Marx!'¹⁶¹ In a virtual 'deconstruction' of Lenin's text, Althusser advances four arguments in an effort to read this statement in an anti-Hegelian manner.

(1) Althusser writes that there is something obviously wrong with taking Lenin's statement at face value, because that would mean that Lenin had not

this and other aspects of Althusser's publications, see the excellent bibliography in Elliott 1987, pp. 344–5.

156 Althusser 1971, p. 108.

157 Althusser 1971, p. 108; emphasis added.

158 Althusser 1971, p. 110.

159 I have already discussed this issue in Chapter 1.

160 Althusser 1971, p. 110; see also *cw* 1:164.

161 Althusser 1971, p. 110; see also *cw* 38:180.

really understood Marx until 1914, a notion that he dismisses as unworthy of discussion. As shown earlier, several other commentators have focussed precisely on this point to suggest a break in Lenin's thought after 1914, something Althusser is as determined to deny as he is determined to uphold a break in Marx's thought after the 1840s.

(2) He fairly pounces on the phrase '*Capital*, especially its first chapter', and says that Lenin meant that you need Hegel's *Logic* to grasp Chapter 1 of *Capital* 'because it is still Hegelian, not only in its terminology, but also in its order of exposition'.¹⁶² Thus, he attempts to limit Lenin's statement to Chapter 1 while dismissing that chapter as relatively unimportant. Again, this flies in the face of other commentators, including Lukács in *History and Class Consciousness* and even Marx himself in the preface to the 1872–5 French edition of *Capital*. There, Marx wrote: 'The method of analysis which I have employed ... *makes the reading of the first chapters rather arduous*, and it is to be feared that the French public ... may be disheartened because they will be unable to move on at once. This is a disadvantage I am powerless to overcome ... There is no royal road to science, and only those who do not dread the fatiguing climb of its steep paths have a chance of gaining its luminous summits'.¹⁶³ Thus, unlike Althusser, Marx seems to give great importance to Chapter 1, especially for French readers.

(3) In his most daring move, Althusser attempts to reverse Lenin's statement, contending that it makes more sense that way: 'Lenin did not need to read Hegel in order to understand him, because he had already understood Hegel, having closely read and understood Marx. Bearing this in mind, I shall hazard a peremptory aphorism of my own: "A century and a half later no one has understood Hegel because it is impossible to understand Hegel without having thoroughly studied and understood *Capital*".'¹⁶⁴ This aphorism is certainly Althusserian in its anti-Hegelianism combined with its commitment to serious theorising, but it fails to answer why Lenin so assiduously studied Hegel in the midst of a crisis of Marxism during World War 1.

(4) Althusser contends that the Hegel Notebooks are really only notes after all, many of them merely 'to summarise what one has just read' rather than notes 'to assess what one has just read'.¹⁶⁵ This argument cannot explain away the many Hegelian statements in Lenin's Notebooks, however, statements that seem to be not summaries but rather analysis and assessment, including the one on the need to understand Hegel's *Logic* to fully grasp *Capital*.

162 Althusser 1971, p. 111.

163 Marx 1976a, p. 104. Emphasis added.

164 Althusser 1971, p. 112.

165 Althusser 1971, p. 113.

Althusser now wants to show us what Lenin's 'materialist reading' of Hegel consists of.¹⁶⁶ It means not just a mere 'inversion' of Hegel, putting 'matter in place of the Idea', but a 'proletarian class viewpoint', which involves the rejection of most of Hegel and the extraction of 'certain well-chosen fruits'.¹⁶⁷ He quotes Lenin to the effect that 'nine-tenths of it [Hegel's thought, or part of it], however, is chaff, rubbish'.¹⁶⁸ Although it is certainly true that Lenin occasionally makes such statements in his Hegel Notebooks, the extracts from Hegel that he writes down are so extensive that there is still a lot left over after the 'rubbish' has been extracted. Additionally, it should be noted that Lenin makes this remark when he is only about halfway through Hegel's text. As he works his way through the *Logic*, he shows a greater and greater appreciation of Hegel.

The final section of Althusser's article, entitled 'What Is It That Interests Lenin?' revolves around two issues: (1) Althusser does acknowledge that Lenin partially embraces Hegel's critique of Kant as he reads the *Logic*, but he still sees no key differences between Lenin's view in 1914–15 and that in *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*: 'Lenin uses Hegel's criticism of Kant to criticise Kant from the viewpoint of science, of scientific objectivity and its correlate, the material existence of its object'.¹⁶⁹ Is that all that Lenin appropriates from Hegel's critique of Kant? Many would argue differently, especially when Lenin moves into the last book of the *Logic*, the 'Subjective Logic, or the Doctrine of the Notion', where he seems to embrace Hegel's notion of subjectivity while sharply attacking Kant.

(2) Most importantly, Althusser does not flinch from acknowledging that 'Lenin is passionately interested in the chapter on the Absolute Idea, which he sees as almost materialist'.¹⁷⁰ How can Althusser reconcile his own anti-humanism and anti-idealism with Lenin's fascination with Hegel's absolute idealism in the last chapter of the *Logic*? The argument is once again quite intricate: unlike the humanism of other parts of Hegel's work, writes Althusser, 'a process without a subject is precisely what can be found in the chapter on the Absolute Idea'.¹⁷¹ This is because Hegel's 'Absolute Idea is simply the absolute method ... the idea of process is the only Absolute'.¹⁷² What of course interests the anti-humanist Althusser here is this notion of a 'process without a subject,

166 Althusser 1971, p. 115.

167 Althusser 1971, pp. 113–16.

168 Althusser 1971, p. 116; see also *cw* 38:154.

169 Althusser 1971, p. 119.

170 Althusser 1971, p. 120.

171 Althusser 1971, p. 121.

172 Althusser 1971, p. 123.

both in reality and in scientific knowledge'.¹⁷³ He concludes that if one then adds a 'proletarian class viewpoint', one can thus 'obtain the Marxist-Leninist concept of the materialist dialectic' from Hegel's absolute idea.¹⁷⁴

There is a major problem with such a thesis, however. In the first paragraph of his chapter on the absolute idea, Hegel focuses on 'free subjective Notion that is for itself and therefore possesses personality'.¹⁷⁵ This concept, which is permeated with subjectivity, is central to the entire chapter.¹⁷⁶ Second, Althusser sees an objectivity that has by the concluding chapter on the absolute idea eliminated all subjectivity, thus ending the *Logic* with a process without a subject. I think Marx's view of this issue in his 1844 *Manuscripts* is preferable. There, Marx characterises Hegel's dialectic in a manner totally opposite to that of Althusser, writing of a subjectivity that has absorbed objectivity as the core concept: 'the subjectivity of objective essential capacities, whose action must, therefore, also be objective'.¹⁷⁷ Of course, to Althusser, such writings of Marx are pre-Marxist. That adjective might more easily be applied to his own scientific view: pre-Marxist and also pre-Hegelian.

In sum, Althusser does, to his credit, make a most original and intricate attack on the notion of an affinity between Hegelian and Marxist concepts of dialectic. Although he is better known for doing so through his attacks on

173 Althusser 1971, p. 123.

174 Althusser 1971, pp. 124, 123.

175 *SL* 824.

176 Raya Dunayevskaya focuses on the concept of subjectivity in the absolute idea chapter in her 1953 'Letters on Hegel's Absolutes', reprinted in Dunayevskaya 1989, p. 33.

177 Marx 1958a [1844], p. 315. Interestingly, Dunayevskaya had as early as 1964 written on Mao's 'subjectivism' as in the Great Leap Forward of the 1950s, a subjectivism that, she held, 'has no regard for objective conditions'. She wrote that this contrasted with Marx's concept of a 'subjectivity which has "absorbed" objectivity', a concept she traced to Marx's 1844 Hegel critique. She saw the latter as a profound statement of Marx's humanism. (See Dunayevskaya 1988 [1958], p. 327). On the other hand, Althusser has often been drawn to Mao's interpretation of the concept of contradiction, an interpretation dubbed 'subjectivist' by Dunayevskaya and others. In his 1937 essay 'On Contradiction', Mao writes: 'When the superstructure (politics, culture, etc.) obstructs the development of the economic base, political and cultural changes become the principal and decisive factors' (Mao 1968, pp. 58–9). Althusser extends this concept to 'ideological state apparatuses' that 'function by ideology' (Althusser 1971, p. 145). For Althusser, the humanist concept of the subject is an example of this type of ideological concept, one that legitimates the system today. From a humanist standpoint, however, it could be argued that Althusser's notion of Marxism as a science without a subject is itself an expression of the narrow subjectivity of the isolated radical intellectual, a subjectivity that has not absorbed the objectivity of either Hegel's dialectic or of the new emancipatory movements of the post-war era, such as the youth, women's, and black movements.

Hegelian influences in Marxism and his related notion of an epistemological break in Marx's thought, his work on Lenin is an important part of his intellectual project. Here, on the contrary, he stubbornly denies even the possibility of a break in Lenin's thought between the period of crude materialism as expressed in *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* and the Hegel Notebooks. In this sense his critique lacks the probing and intellectually more honest character of Colletti's earlier discussion. Colletti admitted to a break in Lenin's thought but deplored the post-1914 turn to Hegel. Althusser did for a time manage to shift the debate away from the crudity of *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* versus the profundity of the Hegel Notebooks to the question of whether Lenin – and for that matter, Marx – broke with philosophy altogether. But that is just another way of arguing that they broke completely with Hegel. Why then, if Marx had done so already, did Lenin see the need to return to Hegel at such great length in 1914–15? Althusser does not even attempt to answer this question.¹⁷⁸

During the 1970s new discussions on Lenin and Hegel took place in other quarters. In 1970 the Trotskyist theorist Michael Löwy, a student of Lucien Goldmann, published an article on Lenin's post-1914 theoretical work.¹⁷⁹ Without mentioning Althusser, but seemingly responding to some of his arguments, Löwy writes that the early Lenin, then under the influence of Plekhanov in matters of philosophy, made the error of 'identifying metaphysical materialism as a current within Marxism'.¹⁸⁰ Löwy argues that it was the 'break [*coupure*]' in Lenin's thought occasioned by his 1914–15 Hegel studies that led to the radicalism of his 1917 April Theses.

Löwy writes that the Marxism of the Second International with which Lenin broke in 1914 was 'pre-dialectical'¹⁸¹ in that it held to vulgar materialist positions, privileged objectivity over subjectivity, reduced the dialectic to a Darwinian evolutionism, had an abstract scientific-naturalist concept of historical laws, and tended to reduce phenomena to their separate and distinct components rather than seeing them in a broad, totalistic framework. Lenin's innovations after his Hegel studies were several. First, he began to draw a sharp

¹⁷⁸ Althusser did not return to the issue of Lenin and philosophy at great length after 1970, but many of his arguments were taken up by a like-minded scholar, Dominique Lecourt, who published a book on *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* that also took up the Hegel Notebooks briefly, arguing that Lenin used Hegel solely to bolster the critique of Kant that he had already made in the earlier work. See Lecourt 1973.

¹⁷⁹ Michael Löwy's 1970 article was reprinted in his Löwy 1973, pp. 113–50.

¹⁸⁰ Löwy 1973, p. 132.

¹⁸¹ Löwy 1973, p. 138.

separation between 'stupid' and 'vulgar' materialism and dialectical materialism, criticising in particular the mechanistic materialism of Plekhanov. Second, he moved from a unilinear to a dialectical concept of causality, now viewing cause and effect as a mutual interaction. Third, he worked out a dialectical rather than an evolutionary conception of historical development. Fourth, he distanced himself from rigid conceptions of historical or scientific laws. Fifth, he developed a concept of totality that anticipated that of Lukács in *History and Class Consciousness*. Löwy writes that in all these ways, Lenin 'liberated' himself from the 'pseudo-orthodoxy of the Second International, of the limit which the latter placed on his thought'.¹⁸² He was on the road toward 1917. Löwy writes further that 'what interests us here is less a study of the philosophic content of the Notebooks "in themselves" than one of their *political consequences*'¹⁸³ and thus does not take his analysis of Lenin on Hegel beyond this fairly general level. He argues that Lenin's 1917 positions were a break not only with reformism but also with pre-1914 Bolshevism.

In 1974 French Hegel scholar Guy Planty-Bonjour published *Hegel et la pensée philosophique en Russie*, which devotes a chapter to Plekhanov and Lenin. In this book Planty-Bonjour tends to downplay the differences between Lenin and Plekhanov on dialectics, arguing that Plekhanov *did* work out much of his concept of dialectic based on a materialist reading of the Hegelian theory of contradiction. Thus, he finds Lenin's attacks on Plekhanov in the Hegel Notebooks to be 'excessive'.¹⁸⁴ Planty-Bonjour also points to the fact that, in his 1922 article in *Under the Banner of Marxism*, Lenin did urge the youth to study Plekhanov and argues that 'the opposition between these two men is more political than philosophical'.¹⁸⁵

Planty-Bonjour also argues for a fundamental continuity between Lenin's earlier and later writings on Hegel, writing that his 1914–15 notebooks 'certainly very much enriched'¹⁸⁶ the stance toward Hegel that Lenin first developed in the 1890s. He argues that in the Hegel Notebooks 'Lenin critiques and refutes Hegel. The idealist dialectic is not the Marxist dialectic and the Russian reader does not hesitate to notice this. ... One who reads Hegel's text, then goes to Lenin's text – this is in any case the only profitable procedure – often has the impression that Lenin has just made a misinterpretation'.¹⁸⁷ Lenin has not,

182 Löwy 1973, p. 142.

183 Ibid.

184 Planty-Bonjour 1974, p. 262.

185 Planty-Bonjour 1974, p. 273.

186 Ibid.

187 Planty-Bonjour 1974, p. 282.

however, misinterpreted Hegel. This confusion has frequently arisen because, argues Planty-Bonjour, in the notebooks Lenin is not really commenting on or summarising Hegel but rather ‘utilising the Hegelian dialectic to justify dialectical materialism’ and also to clarify the latter by use of Hegel’s text.¹⁸⁸ With such implausible arguments he seeks to avoid the ‘one-sidedness’ and ‘sterile opposition’¹⁸⁹ between the positions of Althusser on the one hand and those of Lefebvre, Garaudy, and Lukács on the other. Regarding Lenin’s overall heritage, he writes that it is ‘curious to note that an author who said so clearly that it is impossible to understand Marx without thoroughly studying Hegel had heirs who viewed Hegel as a “dead dog”’.¹⁹⁰ In sum, while defending in general the importance of Hegel to Marxism, Planty-Bonjour also concedes quite a bit to Althusser and other anti-Hegelian Marxists. He creates a synthesis of the early and later Lenin plus Plekhanov, obscuring the new and most creative aspects of the Hegel Notebooks. After the mid-1970s the debate over Lenin and Hegel in France seemed to die down, as did many other debates over Marxist theory, as the focus of intellectuals moved toward anti-Marxist positions. By the 1990s there was little trace of the earlier discussions of Lenin and Hegel, which had developed over four decades, beginning in the late 1930s.

6 The United States in the 1970s and 1980s: Dunayevskaya’s Critiques of Lenin

Numerous discussions of Lenin and Hegel took place in the United States from 1970 on. From the early 1960s onward Dunayevskaya continued to work on *Philosophy and Revolution* (1973), a Hegelian Marxist work that made Lenin’s Hegel Notebooks so central to its argument that the author wrote of the ‘theoretic void in the Marxist movement subsisting ever since the death of Lenin’.¹⁹¹ An early and abbreviated version of her discussion there of Lenin and Hegel appeared in one of the first issues of *Telos*, a journal founded by intellectuals from the 1960s generation.¹⁹² During the 1970s *Telos* introduced the work of Lukács, Korsch, Adorno, Benjamin, Merleau-Ponty, and many other Western Marxists to the English-speaking world, before moving to a leftist post-Marxist

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

¹⁸⁹ Planty-Bonjour 1974, p. 284.

¹⁹⁰ Planty-Bonjour 1974, p. 317.

¹⁹¹ Dunayevskaya 1989 [1973], p. 25.

¹⁹² Dunayevskaya 1970. See also Dunayevskaya 1973, which includes a sharp critique of Mao’s concept of contradiction that is counterposed to Lenin’s concept of dialectic.

position and, still later, to an almost neo-conservative one. Dunayevskaya's 1970 assessment of Lenin for *Telos* was somewhat different from her stance in *Marxism and Freedom* (1958), for in that later work she critiques what she terms Lenin's philosophic ambivalence. This notion revolves around the fact that Lenin never made his Hegel Notebooks public. She argues that, although he gave some indication of a new stance toward Hegel in public statements after 1915, Lenin left an ambivalent heritage in that he also allowed *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* to be reissued in Russia after the revolution without any comment distancing himself from that early mechanistic work.

At the time strongly influenced by Dunayevskaya's work on Lenin and Hegel, *Telos* founder Paul Piccone published an article on this topic in 1970 entitled 'Towards an Understanding of Lenin's Philosophy' in *Radical America*, another theoretical journal established by New Left activists, some of whom held positions close to those of C.L.R. James. This article, which appeared in a special 'Lenin-Hegel' issue of *Radical America*, mainly takes up a critique of *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*. Piccone begins his essay by defending the dialectic as the core of Marxism and writes that 'Lenin's philosophy must be seen within the context of this crisis of Marxism and, in its historical development from *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* to the *Philosophical Notebooks*, as an attempt to overcome such a crisis'.¹⁹³ Piccone argues further that 'it is imperative to distinguish between Lenin's early mechanistic materialism, and his late dialectical Leninism',¹⁹⁴ citing not only the Hegel Notebooks but also Lenin's 1922 call to establish a 'Society of Materialist Friends of the Hegelian Dialectic'.¹⁹⁵ He also writes: 'Even though Lenin outgrew his crude epistemology and his political programs show a living dialectic unsurpassed to this day, he never reformulated his obsolete earlier account, and left Marxism as much of a fragment as he had found it at the turn of the century'.¹⁹⁶ Piccone writes further that Hegelian Marxists such as Lukács, Gramsci, and Korsch tried to pick up these threads but also failed, leading him to conclude that 'it remains today as the main task of the New Left to pick up precisely where the theoretical elaboration was left off so as to expedite the development of a concrete political praxis'.¹⁹⁷ Piccone and most of his *Telos* colleagues almost immedi-

193 Piccone 1970, p. 6. Piccone writes that in his discussion of the Hegel Notebooks, 'I am greatly indebted to Raya Dunayevskaya, who has more fully developed these very same points' (p. 10).

194 Piccone 1970, p. 9.

195 Ibid., p. 20.

196 Ibid.

197 Ibid.

ately moved away from some of these positions, especially from the attempt to critically appropriate Lenin's Hegel Notebooks. Nonetheless, this episode, brief as it was, shows that in the United States the discussion of Lenin and Hegel was, as in France, caught up intimately with more generalised discussions of Hegelian and Western Marxism and the post-1968 search for a philosophy of revolution.

Dunayevskaya's *Philosophy and Revolution* takes up Lenin in the context of what she saw as the needed return by Marxists to a direct but critical appropriation of Hegel: 'Because the transformation of reality is central to the Hegelian dialectic, Hegel's philosophy comes to life, over and over again, in all periods of crisis and transition, when a new historic turning point has been reached, when the established society is undermined and a foundation is laid for a new social order'.¹⁹⁸ She is referring especially to Marx's 1844 *Manuscripts*, Lenin's Hegel Notebooks, and the post-World War II probing into Marx's relation to Hegel.

Her own book examines some of Hegel's most idealistic works, finding there a concept of 'absolute negativity as new beginning'.¹⁹⁹ Dunayevskaya finds Hegel's dialectic to be at its most critical and revolutionary where it is the most abstract: 'Precisely where Hegel sounds most abstract, seems to close the shutters tight against the whole movement of history, there he lets the lifeblood of the dialectic – absolute negativity – pour in'.²⁰⁰ In particular she elaborates more fully in this book her overall concept of Hegel's absolutes as a crucial vantage point for Hegelian Marxism. She also takes up Marx's relation to Hegel as expressed in the 1844 *Manuscripts*, the *Grundrisse*, and *Capital* before coming to Lenin. After taking up Lenin, the book moves into a critique of three later radical theorists, Trotsky, Mao, and Sartre, before examining contemporary theoretical and political issues in the African revolutions, the East European revolts, and the 1960s social movements. Although the Hegelian concept of absolute negativity as new beginning grounds the entire work, its turning point is the chapter entitled 'The Shock of Recognition and the Philosophic Ambivalence of Lenin'. Lenin is portrayed as, on the one hand, the only major Marxist leader in the generation that followed Marx to have made a serious study of Hegel. On the other hand, he is a theorist whose philosophical ambivalence helped to bury Hegel studies within Marxism, especially after his death.

As she did in *Marxism and Freedom*, Dunayevskaya argues that Lenin's critique of the Second International leadership on dialectics in the Hegel Notebooks was also a self-critique. As Lenin became more and more immersed in

198 Dunayevskaya 1989 [1973], p. xv.

199 Dunayevskaya 1989 [1973], p. 3.

200 Dunayevskaya 1989 [1973], pp. 31–2.

Hegel once he got past the beginning sections of the *Science of Logic*, he gave up his wariness and his constant resolve to read Hegel materialistically, instead experiencing 'the shock of recognition that the Hegelian dialectic was revolutionary'.²⁰¹ Lenin began to view the relationship between idealism and materialism as complementary rather than antagonistic and hit out against 'vulgar materialism'.²⁰² This new attitude can be seen in his statement in the notebooks that 'cognition not only reflects the objective world, but creates it',²⁰³ Dunayevskaya argues.

Dunayevskaya also argues that this last statement, combined with the more famous one on the need to study Hegel's *Science of Logic* to grasp Marx's *Capital* and Lenin's comment that therefore 'none of the Marxists for the past half century have understood Marx', shows a profound self-critique and, at the same time, 'just how far Lenin has traveled from the photocopy theory of *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*': 'Lenin had gained from Hegel a totally new understanding of the unity of materialism and idealism. *It was this new understanding that subsequently permeated Lenin's post-1915 writings in philosophy, politics, economics and organisation*'.²⁰⁴ Even Hegel's absolute idea is not dismissed by Lenin, who wrote that this chapter too is on dialectical method and 'contains almost nothing that is specifically *idealism*'. Lenin found there that Hegel was instead 'stretching a hand to materialism' in the concluding paragraph of the *Science of Logic* when he wrote that the logical idea moves toward nature. Dunayevskaya argues that Lenin's Hegel studies go beyond not only those of his theoretical contemporaries but also those of Engels, who was in her view burdened by a 'mechanical materialism'.²⁰⁵

There is, however, also a very sharp and often overlooked critique of Lenin in *Philosophy and Revolution* centring on the concept of his 'philosophic ambivalence': 'Lenin had not prepared his *Philosophic Notebooks* for publication, and in this resided his philosophic ambivalence ... a most confusing, totally contradictory double vision: on the one hand the known vulgarly materialistic *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*; on the other hand endless [public] references to dialectics'.²⁰⁶ In addition, in reference to one of his major public statements on dialectics after 1914, the 1922 article in *Under the Banner of Marxism*, Dunayevskaya writes that the 'duality in Lenin's philosophical heritage

201 Dunayevskaya 1989 [1973], p. 97.

202 Dunayevskaya 1989 [1973], p. 98.

203 Dunayevskaya 1989 [1973], p. 101.

204 Dunayevskaya 1989 [1973], p. 103.

205 Dunayevskaya 1989 [1973], p. 105.

206 Dunayevskaya 1989 [1973], pp. 106–7.

is unmistakable'.²⁰⁷ She sees this duality because in that speech Lenin advocates the study and discussion of Hegel's major works but also advises the youth to begin by studying Plekhanov, one of the theorists singled out in the notebooks for being essentially undialectical.

Thus, Lenin is singled out as the major continuator of Hegelian-Marxist dialectics after Marx's death, yet at the same time his heritage is an ambivalent one because he never publicly resolved the differences between his early and his later writings on dialectics. Dunayevskaya argues in this chapter that much of what Lenin did achieve on the dialectics of revolution is best seen in his comments on Bukharin, not only in the debate on the national question, but also in Lenin's 'Will', where he says that Bukharin never really understood the dialectic. The argument with Bukharin, who was a leftist revolutionary and a Bolshevik, shows that Lenin's critique of other Marxists after 1914 was not limited to revolution versus reform or other political issues but included as well arguments with other leftist revolutionaries who clung to what Lenin regarded as abstract, undialectical conceptions.²⁰⁸

By the 1980s Dunayevskaya sharpened her critique of Lenin further. In her *Rosa Luxemburg, Women's Liberation, and Marx's Philosophy of Revolution* (1982), she argues: 'Although Lenin was the lone revolutionary Marxist who did turn to a study of Hegel in 1914, the fact that he nevertheless kept his profound Abstract of Hegel's *Science of Logic* to himself bears out the truth of the subordinate position of philosophy in established Marxism. It also points to the fact that Lenin himself was not ready to openly reveal his break with his old mechanistic position in *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* and thus blunted creative new points of departure for future generations'.²⁰⁹ She writes that this failure to make public his probing into Hegel 'shows the depth of the economist mire'²¹⁰ into which Marxism, including that of Lenin, had fallen in the generation after Marx. For that generation, economics overshadowed dialectics. Here the stress is not on a theoretical void in the Marxist movement since the death of Lenin but rather on a concept of 'post-Marx Marxists', beginning with Engels, who in the author's view obscured the underlying dialectical framework of Marx's work.

207 Dunayevskaya 1989 [1973], p. 117.

208 During this same period a theorist from the 1960s generation, Andrew Feenberg, published a critique of Lenin's Hegel Notebooks, arguing that Lenin essentially misunderstood the Marxist concept of totality. See Feenberg 1975.

209 Dunayevskaya 1991 [1982], p. 176.

210 Dunayevskaya 1991 [1982], p. 116.

Whereas her earlier work stresses the discontinuities between Lenin's Hegel Notebooks and the writings of other Marxist theoreticians, Dunayevskaya's sharpened critique in the 1980s puts Lenin's ambivalence at the centre of the problem of post-Marx Marxism's having privileged economics over dialectics. Another critique of Lenin that she begins to develop in this book is the notion that Lenin ultimately failed to connect his probing on Hegel to a new concept of organisation. Till the end of his life he clung to the undialectical and elitist concept of the vanguard party, even as he developed newer, more dialectical concepts of imperialism, the national question, the state, and revolution. Unlike in some spontaneist critiques, however, Dunayevskaya is here concerned not only with decentralisation and spontaneity but also with some type of relationship between organisation and dialectical philosophy. As we saw in the previous chapter, this was part of her problematic from 1940s onward, but in the 1980s she poses it with new urgency and concreteness.

In her last writings, during the years 1986–7, Dunayevskaya was developing an extensive critique not only of Lenin's philosophical ambivalence in failing to publish the Hegel Notebooks but also of their content itself. In some respects she was building on her 1953 critique of Lenin's treatment of the final paragraphs of the *Science of Logic*, which I discussed in the previous chapter, but in other important respects her 1986–7 positions were new. She developed these interpretations of the Hegel Notebooks in drafts and notes for an unfinished book tentatively entitled 'Dialectics of Organisation and Philosophy'. One of these drafts, which has been published posthumously as the preface to a new edition of her *Philosophy and Revolution*, summarises her 1986–87 critique of Lenin's Hegel Notebooks. She writes: 'I am now changing my attitude toward Lenin – specifically on Chapter 2 of Section Three of the *Science of Logic*, "The Idea of Cognition"'.²¹¹

There are two major issues involved here. First of all, Dunayevskaya argues that Lenin's reading of Hegel's *Science of Logic* is flawed because he remains only 'on the threshold of the absolute Idea'.²¹² As Lenin begins the final chapter of Hegel's work, he cites approvingly Hegel's notion that 'the Absolute Idea has shown itself to be the unity of the theoretical and the practical Idea. Each of these being by itself one-sided ...'.²¹³ Although Lenin writes quite extensive notes on the absolute idea chapter, Dunayevskaya argues that very little of this deals specifically with that chapter's content. Much of Lenin's notes

211 'Introduction to the Morningside Edition', in Dunayevskaya 1989 [1973], p. xxviii.

212 Dunayevskaya 1989 [1973], p. xxviii.

213 *SL* 824; *CW* 38:219.

here sum up his own earlier reflections, as in his sixteen-point definition of dialectics. Because of this, Lenin misses much of Hegel's revolutionary dialectic, she argues. In particular, he misinterprets in the sixteen-point definition Hegel's crucial category, the 'negation of the negation', as only 'the apparent return to the old'.²¹⁴ She writes further, obviously including Lenin: 'Outside of Marx himself, the whole question of the negation of the negation was ignored by all "orthodox Marxists"'.²¹⁵

Instead of seriously discussing Hegel's concept of negativity in the concluding pages of his 'Abstract of Hegel's *Science of Logic*', Dunayevskaya argues, Lenin is too concerned with the concept of practice. He is very interested in Hegel's view of the unity of theory and practice, but he interprets this in a manner that privileges practice by ignoring Hegel's key statement that the 'practical Idea still lacks the moment of the theoretical Idea' and that 'it is only the will'.²¹⁶ Apparently because of this, Lenin moves in his notes from the *Science of Logic* to the section on volition or will [*Wollen*] near the end of the *Encyclopedia Logic*. Dunayevskaya writes that Hegel's inclusion of this section on the will 'which does not appear in the *Science [of Logic]* left open the door for a future generation of Marxists to become so enthralled with Chapter 2, "The Idea of Cognition" – which ended with the pronouncement that Practice was higher than Theory'.²¹⁷ This, she continues, 'lets Marxists think that now that practice is "higher" than theory, and that "Will", not as willfulness, but as action, is their province, they do not need to study Hegel further'.²¹⁸ In this sense, Lenin and other post-Marx Marxists avoided one of Hegel's most developed texts on dialectics, the absolute idea chapter with which he concludes the *Science of Logic*, something that led them in turn to the privileging of practice over theory. A major consequence of this lacuna is the tendency to miss the type of self-critique that Hegel's concept of absolute negativity offers. In this sense Lenin's Hegel Notebooks *do* fall back into voluntarism to an extent, at least in the conclusion of his 'Abstract of Hegel's *Science of Logic*'. Here her interpretation is sharply opposed to that of Lukács in *The Young Hegel*, which I discussed in the previous chapter, since Lukács identifies strongly with Lenin's stress on practice.

Dunayevskaya's second critique of Lenin on Hegel springs from her 1953 argument that Lenin overly stresses the transition from the logical idea to

214 Dunayevskaya 1989 [1973], p. xxxix; see also *cw* 38:222.

215 Dunayevskaya 1989 [1973], p. xxx.

216 *SL* 821.

217 Dunayevskaya 1989 [1973], p. xxxvii.

218 *Ibid.*

nature as he reaches the end of the *Science of Logic*. Lenin writes that in this passage Hegel 'stretches a hand to materialism'.²¹⁹ Lenin is apparently skipping over as too idealistic the transition to mind, or spirit, that Hegel also makes in the same passage. In 1953 Dunayevskaya wondered how Lenin could have so easily skipped over this transition, which she saw as bringing the reader toward Hegel's *Philosophy of Mind*, where she found what she considered to be the most developed form of Hegel's revolutionary dialectic.²²⁰ In 1986–7 Dunayevskaya sees a new element to this problem, again through textual differences between the *Science of Logic* and the *Encyclopedia Logic*. In the *Encyclopedia Logic*, unlike in the *Science of Logic*, Hegel mentions only the transition from logic to nature (but not to mind). In the *Encyclopedia Logic* Hegel writes: 'the Idea ... resolves to release out of itself into freedom the moment of its particularity ... [i.e.] the immediate Idea as its reflection, or itself as Nature'.²²¹ A similar statement taken from Hegel's supplementary notes [*Zusätze*] follows immediately in the *Encyclopedia Logic*, forming the concluding sentence to the entire work: 'We have now returned to the notion of the Idea with which we began. ... What we began with was Being, abstract Being; while now we also have the Idea as Being; and this Idea that is, is Nature'.²²² It is precisely the last phrase from the *Encyclopedia Logic* – 'this Idea that is, is Nature' – that Lenin quotes in the margin as he ends his discussion of the *Science of Logic*, extolling Hegel's transition from logic to nature as coming close to a materialist position. By one-sidedly using the *Encyclopedia Logic* Lenin has, in Dunayevskaya's view, seriously misinterpreted Hegel once again, this time in too materialist a fashion. Although her main stress is on Lenin's avoidance of the issue of a transition to mind, or spirit, in other writings in this period she also questions his reading of nature as materialism, contrasting his vantage point to that of Marx in the *1844 Manuscripts*.²²³

219 CW 38:234.

220 See the letters from 1953, included in Dunayevskaya 1989.

221 EL ¶244.

222 EL ¶244.

223 On this point see Raya Dunayevskaya, 'Why *Phenomenology*? Why Now? What is the Relationship of either to Organization, or to Philosophy, not Party? 1984–7', in Dunayevskaya 1981–9, p. 10887, where she contrasts Lenin's concept of nature as materialism to that of Marx as well as Sartre. These notes were part of over 200 pages of material that Dunayevskaya wrote in 1986–7 for her planned book 'Dialectics of Organization and Philosophy: The "Party" and Forms of Organization Born out of Spontaneity'. See also the implicit critique of Lenin's view of the transition from logic to nature as one toward materialism in Dunayevska 1989 [1973], p. 37.

Thus, for Dunayevskaya, Lenin's reading of Hegel's absolute idea chapter is to be faulted for a tendency toward a voluntaristic concept of practice and for reading Hegel in too narrowly materialist a manner. This does not mean that she dismisses the whole of Lenin's Hegel Notebooks, however, since she still sees them as a major text on the dialectics of liberation.

In 1986–7, however, she also sharpened her earlier critique of what she viewed as Lenin's failure to reconceptualise his concept of organisation after writing the Hegel Notebooks. This constitutes her third major critique of Lenin's concept of dialectic. In notes for a talk on her book-in-progress written only days before her death, she critiqued both Lenin's concept of vanguardism and Luxemburg's concept of spontaneity: '1987 and the imperativeness of both the objective and subjective urgency now manifests that what has been an untrodden path all these years, by all post-Marx Marxists, including Lenin – who did dig into philosophy, but not the party, and Luxemburg, who did dig into spontaneity, but not philosophy – is organisation, the Dialectics of Philosophy and Organisation. Why did we think once we took the big step of separating, indeed breaking, with the elitist party, that it is sufficient to do so politically without doing so philosophically?'²²⁴ Here Dunayevskaya is suggesting a new type of relationship of dialectics to organisation, one that she points to in many of her writings but that she is trying to conceptualise more explicitly in her unfinished book. Once again, a confrontation with Lenin's Hegel Notebooks is a key element in her elaboration of Hegelian-Marxist dialectic, but by 1987 her view of Lenin has become much more sharply critical than it was in the 1940s and 1950s.

Taken as a whole, Dunayevskaya's critical appreciation of Lenin's Hegel Notebooks over five decades, from the 1940s to the 1980s, constitutes the most serious body of work to date on these notebooks. In her writings Lenin's Hegel Notebooks, even when they are criticised very sharply, live and breathe in the context of contemporary issues and problems within Marxist theory. As we have seen, however, Lenin's Hegel Notebooks were a controversial and much discussed work within Western Marxism for over five decades. Dunayevskaya's interpretation, that of an avowedly Hegelian Marxist who incorporated even Hegel's absolutes into her concept of Marxist Humanism, has occupied one pole of the debate. Nearer to Dunayevskaya's view than others have been the positions of Lefebvre, James, Garaudy, and Fetscher, but none of them used Lenin's Hegel Notebooks in developing their own concepts of Marxism as

224 'Presentation on Dialectics of Organization and Philosophy of June 1, 1987', in Dunayevskaya 1989, p. 9.

extensively as did Dunayevskaya. At the other end of the debate lies the anti-Hegelian scientific-materialist Marxism of Colletti and Althusser, which in various ways tried to minimise the importance of Lenin's Hegel Notebooks. The debates between 'Hegelian' and 'scientific' or 'structuralist' Marxists have been much discussed in the United States, but few have noted that a major part of this debate has consisted of arguments over the significance of Lenin's Hegel Notebooks. Of course, to raise such an issue calls into question the very term 'Western Marxism', since so many of the so-called Western Marxists have been interested in debating the work of Lenin, the founder of 'Eastern' Marxism.

Unfortunately, however, with the exception of Dunayevskaya, most of the Western Marxists who took up Lenin's Hegel Notebooks did so in a manner that separated the Notebooks from his later writings on imperialism, national liberation, the state, and revolution. Even such important Hegelian Marxists as Lukács and Lefebvre played down the break in Lenin's thought after his 1914 encounter with Hegel. In their readings of the Hegel Notebooks, they gave primacy to Lenin's ideas about practice rather than to his engagement with Hegel's idealistic categories such as subjectivity, self-movement, and consciousness, categories that have been so important in debates within Western Marxism as well as in feminist and Black thought from the 1960s onward.

Despite some serious flaws in his theorising, Lenin in his post-1914 writings creatively extended the Marxist dialectic from one of labour versus capital inside Europe and North America to one that also embraced early twentieth-century national liberation movements in countries such as China, India, and Iran as a central form of the dialectics of revolution in the era of imperialism. When these connections were missed or ignored by many Western Marxists, a vital link between the dialectic proper and new forms of subjectivity was lost. All of this bears on the broader issue of concretising the dialectic in the post-World War II world. All too frequently, the realm of Western Marxism has been one of philosophy and culture, cut off from living social movements in the industrialised countries and the Third World, movements of people of colour, youth, and women. These movements, in turn, were robbed of the insights that could have been gained from a philosophy of liberation rooted in Hegel and Marx. All too often, these movements encountered Marxism in the truncated, anti-dialectical form of Marxist-Leninist vanguardism. That is the tragedy within the often hidden, twisting, and complicated story that I have uncovered in tracing the relationship between Lenin, Hegel, and Western Marxism.

CONCLUSION

Lenin's Paradoxical Legacy

As we have seen, Lenin's thought includes an original concept of dialectic drawn out of his 1914–15 Hegel studies, one that took him beyond the cruder forms of materialism held to by many of his contemporaries in the leadership of the Marxist movement, such as Plekhanov, Bukharin, Trotsky, and even Luxemburg, a type of materialism also found in his own pre-1914 work. After 1914 Lenin's work on Hegel helped to shape some of his innovative political and economic concepts around issues such as imperialism, national liberation, the state, and revolution. I have argued that these elements – dialectics, politics, and economics – need to be seen as a totality if we are to get a clear picture of Lenin's theorising after 1914. We have seen the continuing influence of Lenin's Hegel studies in his subsequent use of categories such as transformation into opposite, subjectivity, self-movement, and self-consciousness, as well as Hegel's concept of a dialectical interrelationship between the universal and the particular, all of which, I have argued, form an important part of the grounding for Lenin's dialectical theory of imperialism. Lenin's theory of imperialism is dialectical because in it the new objective stage of the world economy, which he mapped out as imperialism and monopoly capitalism, contains new forms of opposition and contradiction, giving rise to a new form of subjectivity, the national liberation movements of colonised peoples. I have argued that his concept of the state and revolution is also dialectical in the sense that his theoretical model sketches not only the heightened centralisation and militarisation of the state but also the new forms of subjectivity of the working people, in the form of soviets or workers councils, that he saw arising from within. Thus, his theorising after 1914 was increasingly concerned with subjective factors, something unusual for the Marxism of his time. Finally, I have argued that Lenin's Hegel Notebooks, and his public articulation of the need for Marxist theory to ground itself directly in Hegel, had an important if often subterranean influence on many of the leading theorists of Marxist thought in the West – from Lukács to Lefebvre, and from Dunayevskaya to Colletti and Althusser.

Is Lenin's thought then a model for us, as we approach the problems of a global capitalism today? No, it is not, in part – but only in part – because, as Marxists like to say, conditions today are different from those in Lenin's time. What is even more important, however, is that Lenin's thought cannot be a model for us because it was even for its own time deeply flawed. First, his concept of dialectic, which is developed in the 1914–15 Hegel Notebooks and

which *did* break new ground – as seen for example in the aphorism that cognition not only reflects the world but creates it – nonetheless ends with the privileging of practice over theory and of materialism over idealism in such a way as to vitiate some of the more original concepts in the notebooks. The result is that we are still imprisoned to a great extent within the confines of Engelsian Marxism. This ambivalence is heightened further by Lenin's failure to make his Hegel studies public and by his continued uncritical public references to Plekhanov and Engels, even though he had critiqued their concepts of dialectic in the notebooks.

Second, perhaps his most original dialectical concept, the dyad imperialism/national liberation, original as it was, was unfortunately never fully articulated as a theoretical category rooted in dialectics. It was theorised at a political level only, and even there, the record is extremely uneven in terms of its actual concretisation. Thus, on a global scale, the anti-imperialist movements in Ireland, India, China, and Iran were seen as being no less important in Marxist theory and practice than the labour movement in the industrialised countries. Within the boundaries of the old Russian Empire, however, although Finland, Poland, and the Baltic countries did attain independence in the wake of the November Revolution, other areas, such as Central Asia, the Caucasus, and Ukraine, did not and had to wait until the collapse of the Communist system in 1991.

Third, Lenin's concept of the state and revolution, although highly original in its 1917–18 articulation, was quickly abandoned when an older concept within Lenin's thought, vanguardism and discipline from above, reasserted itself during the period of the civil war. The vanguard party was the one key concept that Lenin did not rethink after 1914, that he did not subject to the critique of dialectical reason he had developed in his Hegel studies. These shortcomings in his theorising left at best an ambivalent legacy, with all too much for Stalin and his colleagues to build on as they led the transformation of Soviet Russia into a totalitarian society.

Is Lenin's thought then dead? Has it no relevance for today? This proposition must also be rejected. In 1967, the liberal political theorist Hannah Arendt, speaking at a conference on the legacy of the Russian Revolution, articulated what she saw as the continuing importance of ideas such as Lenin's:

Potentially more explosive is the fusion of nationalism and communism in the underdeveloped countries because there the 'exploitation of man by man' is still as powerful a point of crystallisation as it originally was when Marx wrote *Capital*. 'The beacon of hope' is there now what it once was in the West, and this hope, I think, is less the hope for peace than

for a decisive shift in power. It is the same hope which St. Just voiced long before Karl Marx: '*Les malheureux sont la puissance de la terre*' [the downtrodden are the true power on earth]. Everything we know of history refutes this statement, no revolution has ever been by *les malheureux*, but who could deny the grandeur and the powerful attraction of St. Just's words?¹

Today the global crisis of capitalism and incessant warfare fuelled by super-power rivalries have created outright famine in Africa, while most Third World regimes are at the mercy of the austerity plans of the international bankers. Marxism, discredited in the eyes of many by the collapse of Communism, has been recently on the wane, with religious fundamentalism often stepping in as a rival ideology to channel the anger of the oppressed in a retrogressive direction, not only in the Middle East, but also in South Asia. Nonetheless, I suggest that as long as imperialism and domination by world capitalism afflict the Third World, ideas such as Lenin's concept of national liberation will continue to exert an attraction in the long run.

The world is rife with famine, brutal wars of conquest, and ecological crisis. The reigning forms of political and economic organisation are permeated by racism, sexism, homophobia, and classism. Initially, Western capitalism gained ideological support from the crisis and collapse of Communism in 1989–91, but today, deep economic crises and political instability afflict not only the Third World and the formerly Communist lands but also the wealthier capitalist lands such as Germany, Japan, and the United States. Events as disparate as the rebellion in Los Angeles, the neo-Nazi violence in Germany, and the inability of the liberal democracies to do anything concrete to halt the genocide in the former Yugoslavia, all of them in the context of the most precipitous economic downturn since the Great Depression of the 1930s, have created a deep crisis. That crisis is not only economic, racial, and political but also ideological. Can free-market capitalism and liberal democracy really stand up to fascism? Can this system offer more than austerity, declining living standards, and increased alienation to the working people? Such questions draw us back to Hegel, Marx, and the dialectic. As Dunayevskaya argued in the aftermath of the 1960s: 'Because the transformation of reality is central to the Hegelian dialectic, Hegel's philosophy comes to life, over and over again, in all periods

1 Arendt 1969, p. 449. The quotation from Jacobin leader Saint-Just is from a speech of February 26, 1794.

of crisis and transition, when a new historic turning point has been reached, when the established society is undermined and a foundation is laid for a new social order.² Today we face such a crisis, and I believe firmly that more such returns to Hegel and the dialectic will recur and are recurring.

Given that Marxism was greatly discredited in the 1980s, both by the collapse of Communism and by the emergence of post-structuralist critiques of Marxism, it too is in deep crisis. At the same time, however, empiricism and positivism in both philosophy and the social sciences have also been undermined. This in part accounts for the flowering of new books on Hegel in recent years, especially in the English-speaking world. Even today, however, detailed studies of Hegel's notoriously difficult and intricate *Science of Logic* are far less common than ones on his *Phenomenology*. Even Marx did not leave us much on the *Science of Logic*, although we do have his brilliant unfinished 1844 critique of the *Phenomenology*. Therefore, I have argued, Lenin's work on the *Science of Logic*, if examined critically, can offer us something important. As we have seen, he developed an original and unique reading of Hegel. Although he sometimes missed key Hegelian points in what was after all a fairly brief encounter with a work that specialists spend decades trying to master, his whole lifetime as a revolutionary thinker and leader prepared him to grasp the central thrust of Hegel's dialectic, itself born in response to the French Revolution. Lenin's experiences and position as a political theorist and leader also led him to connect his Hegel studies to core issues in Marxist theory: imperialism, revolution, the state, and national liberation. If in the end he read Hegel too much as a philosopher of practice, even this is not entirely a bad thing, since it is still important to confront his point of view as a counterweight to those who would persist in viewing Hegel's thought as a mystical system enclosed within an ivory tower. Lenin's reading of Hegel also serves as a counterweight to the Western Marxist tradition, one that has tended too often to retreat into the spheres of philosophy and culture, leaving politics and economics to theorists who were not grounded in the dialectic.

Today there is some evidence of a rethinking of Marxism by Marxist and non-Marxist intellectuals alike, and perhaps also, to some degree, of a return to Marx after the Marx-bashing that went on during the 1980s. Much of this seems to be linked to the depth of the economic and social crisis in the Western capitalist countries and also to the abject failure of Western free-market capitalism and multi-party democracy in most of the former Communist lands. In those

2 Dunayevskaya 1989 [1973], p. xxiii.

lands, instead of the predicted flowering of democracy and civil society, there has been a revival of fascism, most notably in Russia with the massive vote in the 1993 elections for the anti-Semitic and, to use Lenin's apt phrase, 'Great-Russian chauvinist' candidate Vladimir Zhirinovskiy.

Even in France, which was for over two decades the generating point of a series of leftist critiques of Marx – from Foucault to Castoriadis and from Baudrillard to Lyotard – suddenly the most internationally famous of all these thinkers, Jacques Derrida, called for a re-reading of Marx in his 1993 book *Les Spectres de Marx*. Some compared this book to Sartre's defence of Marxism in *Search for a Method* in the 1950s, but one difference is that Derrida, unlike Sartre, definitely abstained from declaring himself a Marxist. Another difference is that Derrida's defence of Marx was not connected to any apologies for Stalinism, as Sartre's was. Nonetheless, Derrida's gesture has similarities to that of Sartre, for he argued forcefully and publicly, shockingly to some, that Marx is a thinker of great relevance in today's crisis-ridden world. He opposed today's 'dominant discourse' wherein 'Marx is dead, Communism is dead, and a good thing, with its hopes, its discourse, its theories and its practices', and wherein one hears everywhere the refrain 'long live capitalism, long live the market, economic and political liberalism are back again'.³ Here Derrida was not alone. A series of new works on Marx appeared in the early 1990s in France, leading one philosopher to remark in that country's leading newspaper: 'Some thought he was dead, swept away, vanished forever into the dustbin of history ... On the contrary, it could well be that the end of dogmatic Marxism opens up philosophical readings of an author [who has been] undoubtedly too famous but too little studied'.⁴ Such a resurgence of interest in Marx is also visible in the English-speaking world, although typically hardly something written about in the pro-business mainstream press. Not only have Marxist-oriented critiques of postmodernism and poststructuralism gained a wide and favourable reception,⁵ but there have also been some serious new works dealing directly with Marx.⁶

3 Derrida 1993, p. 90.

4 Roger-Pol Droit, 'Sous le marxisme, la liberté?' *Le Monde des livres*, 3 December 1993. The title of this article, 'Underneath Marxism, Freedom?' seems to be an allusion to the humorous 1968 protest slogan Parisian students chanted while using paving stones to throw at police or as barricades: 'Underneath the paving stones, the beach'.

5 I refer, for example, to the many reviews and discussions of books such as Best and Kellner 1993.

6 See, for example, the following books published in 1993: Postone 1993; Ollman 1993; Moseley (ed.) 1993.

A re-reading of Lenin's work on the dialectic proper and on the dialectics of revolution can make some contributions to these discussions. His is the first major attempt after Marx's death to reconceptualise the dialectic in the light of the first 'crisis of Marxism', the collapse of the Second International at the outbreak of World War I. To be sure, Lenin's reconceptualisation of Marxism in the years 1914–18 involved the study of concrete political and economic phenomena such as imperialism and the state. But it also meant going back to what Marx in *Capital* calls 'the source of all dialectics', Hegel's work.⁷ As we have seen, Lenin carried out a serious reading *for his period* of the *Science of Logic*, and as Lukács was to argue a bit later in *History and Class Consciousness*, the dialectic is the most central and enduring aspect of Marxism. Lenin's study of Hegel in 1914–15 shows how a new reading of the dialectic can lead to a wider, more multi-faceted concept of subjectivity, one that, already by 1916, in its evocation of national liberation movements, was in opposition to what some still criticise the Marxist tradition for being trapped in: a 'Eurocentric metaphysics of labour'.

Furthermore, a critical Marxist reading of Lenin on the dialectic proper and on the dialectics of revolution will be of immeasurable help in the task of rethinking and reconstructing Marxism for the post-Communist, crisis-ridden capitalist world. Any attempt to go back directly to Marx without also working through a critique of the leading post-Marx Marxists – not only Lenin, but also other key philosophers and theorists such as Trotsky, Luxemburg, Kautsky, Lukács, Adorno, Marcuse, Althusser, and Lefebvre – will be inadequate and will leave us with a naïve reading of Marx. Within his theorising Lenin illustrates so many of the contradictions that we still face today: spontaneity versus the need for organisation, structural economic change versus human agency, historical materialism versus dialectical idealism, and particularity versus universality, among others. He poses these issues, works toward solutions, and then falls short.

Too often, Marxist and non-Marxist commentators have seen Lenin primarily as a great political leader, the inventor of the vanguard party to lead; or as a supreme revolutionary tactician, the man who out-manoeuvred all his political rivals in 1917; or as the founder of the world's first Marxist state. These views make light of the very different Lenin displayed in this work. Usually slighted in such accounts is Lenin as an original political and social theorist whose ideas affected his political practice. Even when his political and social theorising – whether on imperialism and the state or on the anti-colonial revolutions and

7 Marx 1976a, p. 744

grassroot workers' movements – has been taken more seriously, examination of this theoretical work has usually been separated from the overall concept of dialectic he worked out in 1914–15 in the Hegel Notebooks. This study has laid bare and critiqued the deeply Hegelian dialectical vision that weaves in and out of Lenin's theory and practice during the last and most crucial decade of his life.

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